

Successful Adaptation of Immigrants to Finland:
Can Cultural Fusion Work?

Master's thesis

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To my husband, how did you put up with this for so long? You are amazing.

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Immigration numbers in Finland are growing, more than doubling in the past decade, with immigrants arriving from increasingly diverse regions of the world. An attempt should be made to understand what are the factors that lead immigrants to finding happiness, and to mitigate the apparent rise in assimilation and anti-immigrant attitude in Finland.</p> <p>Most of the interviewees (n=16; 7 females, 9 males) have embedded themselves in dispersed communities, with connections from the workplace, studies, or common interests (e.g., religion, hobbies) that rarely including their immediate neighbors. Several reported a comfort in their own uniqueness. Some pointed to the kindness of Finns as integral to their successful adaptation. However, mixed in with the positive experiences were barriers as well: limited interaction with locals, their own lack of Finnish language skills, and a perceived limit to the level of acceptance of the cultural differences of newcomers by Finnish society, to the extent that some cultural adaptation expectations of the locals are perceived as unrealistic or even unnecessary.</p> <p>The data indicates that immigrants may not be consciously choosing their adaptation strategies, and perhaps helping the immigrants focus their attention to this could enable them to affect a more desirable outcome, not only for the immigrant but for society as well. Special effort may be required to help male immigrants find something other than a competitive sports community. Additionally, immigrants who relocate subsequent to having adjusted to Finnish culture may need assistance in re-embedding themselves in a new community.</p> <p>I join calls for continuous policy re-examination to consider how a goal of cultural fusion could be adopted and disseminated into integration efforts. Learning the local language is useful, but high-level language skills should not be a prerequisite for exposing an immigrant to Finns (and vice versa). Bring the groups together early on, and find ways to use well-adapted immigrants (many are ready and able) to be a resource to new immigrants, to Finns who must adapt to immigrants, and to those responsible for immigrant integration. Lists of direct advice were assembled from the interviews.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

A recent influx of refugees offers a compelling reason to look at the adaptation of the immigrants who preceded them and to consider what can be learned from the stories of successfully adapted newcomers specifically. In 2015, Finnish authorities issued 20,709 first-time residence permits, additionally a record 32,476 people applied for asylum in Finland, largely from Iraq (63%; Finnish Immigration Services, 2015). Of these asylum seekers, 27,300 have resided in reception centers scattered across the country, increasing the number of reception centers from 20 to 144 and the capacity by more than eight-fold over 2014. While many of those asylum applications will be (or have been) denied and, although there was a significant decline in those seeking asylum in Finland in 2016 (5,631; European Migration Network, 2017), instability persists in countries near the European Union borders and elsewhere. This instability continues to force people to seek asylum in countries like Finland. The number of foreign nationals living in Finland has more than doubled from 2005 to 2015, from 113,925 (UVI, 2005) to 231,295 (Tilastokeskus, 2015).

In addition to the increase in foreign nationals trying to adapt to life in Finland, the rise of assimilationist and anti-immigrant attitude in western countries has not left Finland immune (Kuisma, 2013). An immigrant who has adapted well to life in Finland, one who has learned to communicate effectively with locals in many aspects, may be able to act as a cultural bridge for their fellow immigrants

but also, perhaps even more beneficial, for Finns who are struggling to adapt to these fresh newcomers. Although there is ample research on cultural adaptation focused on the immigrant adapting, some researchers call for attention to the experience of individuals “whose own social world is altered by the intrusion of new influences, like the arrival of immigrants” (Waldram, 2009, p. 176). While this paper does not look to investigate the adaptation of the locals (other than discovering the immigrants’ perception of intercultural strategies that locals tend to use), some attempts by the immigrants at assisting Finnish friends to understand other foreigners better can be seen in the data presented.

This research takes a step back from the traditional assumptions of what makes for the good adaptation of an immigrant to a new culture and looks instead at the voices of happy immigrants in an attempt to inform new immigrants, locals who are trying to adapt to the immigrants, and immigrant integration policy makers.

A review of recent research on cultural adaptation in Finland (see section 2.1) reveals a focus on adolescents, children, or second-generation Finns, or on the Finnish professionals who work with immigrant children or youth, on particular cultural groups, on clients of health and well-being services, or on participants of particular programs that were aimed at helping adult immigrants integrate into Finnish society. Very little research has been done specifically on adaptation of immigrant who have remained in Finland beyond five years (for research on long-term immigrants see Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2008; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013; Mähönen, Leinonen, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013; Varjonen, 2013), and none of this research focuses strictly on what led to the successful adaptation of adult immigrants.

Because of my own experience as an immigrant to Finland, I chose heuristic phenomenology as an approach to find answers to my research questions. In this study, I analyze the experiences and perceptions of 16 immigrants (7 females, 9 males) on their process of cultural adaptation. What do they say contributed to their successful adaptation in Finland? I expected that their stories would reveal adaptation differences. Their road to adaptation hinges on so many variables including childhood experiences and the interpersonal connections that become salient within the various communities they have participated in throughout life, with the underlying effect of factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, knowledge, and skill that may affect one's perception that they have free choice and that their actions can make a difference. This all plays a part in forming personalities and developing conditioned behaviors. Armed with open-ended questions designed to get the immigrant to think about and talk about their background and their adaptation to Finland, I aimed to gather descriptive data from the immigrants' own perspective (their stories). I analyzed the data looking for similarities among and variation between their stories. Through heuristic phenomenology, this study contributes to the understanding of successful immigrant adaptation to Finland. The data reveals ideas that could provide new immigrants and Finns (regular citizens and authorities) with valuable insight into how to facilitate successful adaptation.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature highlighted in this section includes that which guided the early stages of my study in helping me determine who to study and how and in determining what gap there may be in current knowledge about immigrants in Finland and played a role in my later analysis of the data. In the first subsection I highlight some of the major international literature that forms the backbone of a lot of today's research on immigrants. I then highlight what has been found about immigrants to Finland in recent years.

To help comprehend the research presented, there are some key terms for the reader to understand. These terms are often used in research into the changes that occur in individuals when they are confronted with culturally different individuals. Use of the terms is not always consistent in the literature, but I present you with my understanding of the terms.

Cultural adaptation is a process that begins when an individual is new to a culture. Throughout the process, they may drop or transform some of the traditions or practices from their prior culture and may adopt, adjust, or outright reject some new traditions or practices from the new culture in their effort to thrive. We will see that experts do not agree about when or if the process ends. The extremes can be thought to be complete **assimilation** (where the individual would be indistinguishable from a local), or total **separation** or **marginalization** (where the individual will not be willing or able to, find ways to adapt). And a more moderate form of adaptation may be **integration**, where the individual does attempt and manages to change enough to fit in but not fully adjusting—it is more of a negotiation.

Acculturation is the socialization process that leads to mutual cultural adaptation. It is considered to be a two-way process that occurs whenever two cultures come together, in which both retain some of their original culture and both adapt to the other. However, it is often mistakenly equated with the assimilation of the individual who is new to the culture or the minorities in the culture. Rather than deciding that the researchers whose work I present in this section have conceptualized the terms incorrectly (or differently than I have) I have presented their findings using whichever term the researcher used to describe their own research.

2.1 Overview of cultural adaptation research

Cultural adaptation has been researched by many from a variety of disciplines, much of the theory coming out of the North American context. I begin my review of prior research into adaptation with a look at what researchers say about the process. After which, I look at what experts consider are the personal characteristics that lead toward successful adaptation.

2.1.1 The process

Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) theory of cultural adaptation with its steps of enculturation, deculturation, and acculturation that ultimately results in assimilation (also Kim, 2001) has been the backbone of a lot of subsequent research. Their theory is not without opposition, with researchers pointing out that complete assimilation is neither possible nor would it allow for an effect by immigrants on the local culture. De La Garza and Ono (2015) suggested that, during the communicative process that results in immigrant adaptation, the local culture is

also adapting (differential adaptation) making complete assimilation unnecessary and even impossible.

Another scholar, John Berry, is well-known for his research into adaptation. He developed a model of acculturation strategies of newcomers which separates neatly into assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization and an equivalent set of strategies of the host society toward the newcomers (melting pot, multiculturalism, segregation, exclusion). This model (see Berry, 2009 for a version that combines immigrant and host strategies on one diagram; see Berry, 1997, for his earlier descriptions) is convenient for explaining the differences in adaptation outcomes of immigrants and continues to be used by many scholars today, but is also not without criticism. One such notable critique was by Tardif–Williams and Fisher (2009) in which they identified Berry’s 2006 article saying “there is a tendency to see the acculturation process as complete and having reached some psychologically optimal state when an individual has adopted the integrated acculturation strategy,” and they further called for a “reconceptualization of acculturation as a dialogic, relationally constituted and continually negotiated (unfinalizable) process” (p. 151). Berry (2011/2012) seemed at least within his text to address much of the criticism; however, the concerns have not prompted him to update the diagram. Tardif–William and Fisher’s (above) views on the process being dialogic and unfinalizable seem to support some of Bakhtin’s philosophy. In a biography of Bakhtin, O’Neill (2006, p. 652) said that “In Bakhtin’s estimation, the most productive exchanges occur between parties that enter into a discussion with contrasting points of view, allowing for change and diversity in society.” He went on to describe Bakhtin noting that societies

tend to seek homogeneity, which prevents change, and that fortunately some diversity persists.

Some researchers share Bakhtin's positive view of diversity and question why the goal should be to achieve a mind-numbing level of adaptation. After all, do we all subscribe to the adage that "children should be seen and not heard." Kramer (2000, p. 190) told that what is happening in the world today is more of a cultural fusion, and warns that Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) theory of intercultural adaptation justifies and encourages cultural streamlining, rather than sufficiently explaining what is happening. Kramer (2000) suggested that encouraging such a high degree of adaptation (complete assimilation) can quash progress: "One can adapt but the more important and intelligent question is should one adapt or innovate," and furthermore, "the most sophisticated of social skills may be expressed in the process of testing novel ideas and behaviors, finding them to be successful and thus generating new standards of 'appropriateness' and 'competence'" (p. 195). He aptly explained that "natives the world over ... don't necessarily feel comfortable with strangers 'going native' on them. If adaptation has to do with not violating expectations, then one must conform by not conforming" (p. 220). He considers receptivity as relational and so intercultural contact creates cultural fusion. "Life is a continual experiment" (p. 221). He explained the importance of being self-conscious of situatedness, knowing one's "limitation, and the limits of knowing the limits, of embracing prejudice as that which enables perception, not merely 'noise' or filtered 'distortion'" (p. 222). In a later publication, he said "difference, Otherness, is the essence of identity" (Kramer, 2016, p. 17) and that he considers the immigrant as forever having an "accent," which creates a "co-evolutionary process whereby a society both changes

and is changed by immigrants” (p. 18). Croucher and Kramer (2017) further develop cultural fusion into a theory that offers an alternative to the existing acculturation models. They consider difference a vital element of communication and innovation, without it there is nothing to discuss or digest. “There are risks; but to avoid all risks is ultimately nihilistic” (p. 101). According to Kramer (2016), the key to becoming truly intercultural involves learning to understand the Other. This would be dialogic and reciprocal. De La Garza and Ono (2015) call for research that acknowledges the diversity of the immigration experience in order to reveal more.

2.1.2 Personal characteristics that lead to successful adaptation

In the prior section, we saw that some researchers are moving towards the idea that adaptation occurs more like a mutual, continual cultural fusion rather than a one-sided process that has an end. This does not appear to go against much of what researchers in earlier years discovered about people who are successful in new cultural situations.

Referring to an interview she conducted with Edward T. Hall (a respected forefather of intercultural communication research), Pusch (2004) said “Hall was suggesting that exploring what is deep within ourselves is necessary before we can begin to explore what is hidden in the minds of those who are culturally different” (p. 30). This deep exploration can begin when we are exposed to a new culture and can lead to the communication resourcefulness (cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally) that Ting-Toomey (1993) considered integral to becoming a truly competent communicator interculturally.

A successful multicultural person will have built such competence. Adler (1998) suggested that one who has become multicultural would be “intellectually and emotionally committed to the basic unity of all human beings while at the same time recognizing, legitimizing, accepting, and appreciating the difference that exists between people of different cultures” (p. 227). The person would have “psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities” (p. 227).

Adler said that these are individuals who are “more fluid and mobile, more susceptible to change, more open to variation” (p. 228). He does not indicate that they do this naively, but rather he says that they would have an “abiding commitment to the essential similarities among people everywhere, while paradoxically maintaining an equally strong commitment to differences” (p. 228). Adler (1998, p. 228) quoted Walsh, 1973, *Intercultural Education in the Communication of Man*, saying that in forming one’s multicultural identity, they seek “to preserve whatever is most valid, significant and valuable in each culture as a way of enriching and helping to form the whole.”

Some researchers point to ethnic proximity or compatibility as a predisposition to successful adaptation (e.g., see Kim, 2001) and consider host receptivity to one’s original culture as having an effect on one’s ability to adapt. As mentioned in the previous subsection, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) and Kim (2001) suggested that the ultimate end of adaptation is assimilation. However, assimilation would not allow for the preservation of any valid elements of one’s original culture, which was considered by Adler as instrumental in forming a multicultural identity. Nevertheless, Kim (2001) seems to agree with the importance of cultivating an adaptive personality in order to successfully adapt to a new culture.

To this end, she suggested that “developing our host communication competence and participating in the host social communication process is profoundly affected by our own individual personality dispositions.” Although she admits that changing our disposition as adults is difficult, she said that with sufficient will and determination, “all of us can strive to raise our levels of openness, strength, and positivity” (p. 231). In many ways, this would seem to concur with Adler’s (1998) multicultural identity concept as well as lead to Ting-Toomey’s (1993) communicative resourcefulness.

In this section, I outlined some of the major contributions by researchers to what we understand about intercultural adaptation today. For the most part, there seems to be a shift towards integration over assimilation as the goal. Next, I look at the knowledge that recent researchers of adaptation to Finland have amassed about various immigrant groups and within various contexts to discover how it aligns with this integration goal.

2.2 Research into immigrant cultural adaptation to Finland

This by no means represents a comprehensive look at recent research into adaptation of immigrants to Finland, but reflects the portion of the background reading on the subject which helped focus my attention toward the research project I undertook and present here. This section gives a few details about related research and highlights some of the conclusions that support immigrant integration over assimilation.

Liebkind and Kosonen (1998) measured the degree of acculturation of Vietnamese refugee children and youth (age 8 to 19) and analyzed their

responses and responses by their Finnish peers to statements designed from various scales to measure psychological symptoms of depression and various values important to one or the other culture (revolving around family solidarity, child autonomy, gender equality). They found some gender and age specific variations, but in general found support that assimilation orientation of refugees has psychological disadvantages, particularly for 17- to 19-year-old refugees. They call for the society to aim at a slower, more integrative acculturation process that encourages the development of a bi-cultural identity, rather than aiming at rapid, complete assimilation.

Jasinskaja-Lahti, alone and with various colleagues, has extensively explored Russian and Russian-speaking immigrants (children and adults) to Finland both in general (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2000; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä, 2011; Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2010) and in comparison to other immigrants to Finland (Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2008; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2007; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000a, 2000b; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004) and to similar immigrants in other countries (Israel, Germany, and Estonia; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Horenczyk, Kinunen, 2011; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2010) looking at adaptation, well-being, acculturation attitudes, and predictors of acculturation. Of special note, in her dissertation, Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000) examined the acculturation and adaptation of 170 Russian-speaking immigrant adolescents in comparison to both immigrants from other background and the acculturation expectations of Finnish youth, as well as looking for variations between the Russian-speakers considered to be returnees and those without a Finnish cultural ancestry. Overall, the Russian-speaking youth

revealed a tendency to integrate into Finnish society (as opposed to assimilating), and goes further to indicate that “preference for the integration option suggests greater tolerance and openness among the host nationals, and motivation for cultural adjustment and integration among the immigrants” (p. 61). However, Veistilä (2013) examined immigrant families of Russian background, who live in South-Eastern Finland, to see how child well-being is constructed. She found the children’s acculturation strategies to be largely oriented toward assimilation or segregation (with a strong desire to belong to one or the other group), whereas their parents were aiming more for integration. In the introduction, she makes a valid point that “... child well-being is not restricted to the present lives of children, but has repercussions on their future” (Veistilä, 2013, p. 174). Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000), although finding more integration orientation among adolescents than Veistilä found among children, called for the promotion of an appreciation for cultural and linguistic diversity in Finnish society. In a later collaborative effort, Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2013) concluded that “societies need to focus especially on promoting positive intergroup relations between newcomers and the national majority group and supporting the development of sociocultural skills required for active participation in the society” (p. 802).

Looking exclusively at adults, the cultural identity of female professionals from Russian backgrounds working in Finland was analyzed by Lahti (2013). Women whose work included extensive interactions in a culturally diverse workplace were included in the study, which aimed to look at something other than organizational efficiency or discrimination—rather she was interested in the formation of cultural identity via workplace interactions. She disappointedly found no narrative depicting the beneficial application of the individuals’

cultural knowledge to organizational-level innovation or knowledge construction, as would be ideal (beyond pointing to the value of using their cultural knowledge as an advantage in their work when dealing specifically with Russian business counterparts). But perhaps what she was searching for is too complex an outcome to be able to pinpoint the root. The co-building of cultural knowledge and the general advantages of diversity may be having positive effects that are simply beyond the individuals' consciousness.

Even though it may be difficult to pinpoint the positive effects of intergroup contact, the need for societies to aim for it has been highlighted by other researchers in addition to Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2013; highlighted earlier). Croucher, Aalto, Hirvonen, and Sommier (2013) looked at the relationship between the intergroup contact of Finns with Muslim immigrants and how it correlates to the feeling of threat. They found that contact itself does not help but that the depth of the contact is significant. They call for Finnish authorities to develop opportunities to create these deeper connections.

Some difficulties in achieving effective intergroup contact has been documented. Examining policy and discourse of the True Finns party, Kuisma (2013) found that economic motivations can be attributed to the rise of the populist radical right party in Finland. Saukkonen (2014) examined multiculturalism and diversity in a political sense and found that, while there is evidence of improved multicultural policy rhetoric in Finland (as in the two other Northern European countries examined), it has not translated to effective policy implementation. He points to lack of funding opportunities for large-scale initiatives and makes special mention that the concept of group-specific multiculturalism may be difficult to implement "into a field that has been accustomed to work in terms of universal

values, quality-based assessment, individual creativity and national interest” (p. 196). On the surface, these are commendable values and elements, and keeping in mind where we are coming from makes it easier to understand just how difficult it is to affect the needed change to real multiculturalist practice. These findings show no progress from what Saukkonen and Pyykkönen (2008) uncovered years earlier where Saukkonen and his colleague revealed that adjustments to official policy that were made for cultural diversity were not unambiguous, and the solutions did not address the intention. After interviewing key actors in the Helsinki area, they critiqued the resulting programs saying “it is obvious that there is often less real activity than programmes promise” (p. 60). As an example, they described an attempt by the city of Helsinki to bring together members of the dominant culture with immigrants and other minorities through the establishment of an institute, Caisa, and pointed out that the institute has been criticized by researchers (referring to Toikka, 2001, and Joronen, 2003; although the later noted more interaction than the former) for not succeeding in bringing about deep and frequent enough connections. In Saukkonen (2013), he notes that

in principle, integration has deliberately been defined as a holistic process where immigrants are supposed to both participate in Finnish society and to maintain their own language and culture, and where Finnish society is also expected to adapt to changing circumstances. However, policy practice concentrates almost exclusively on the personal development that the immigrant makes in finding their place in the Finnish social, economic, political and cultural systems, and in the labour market in particular. (p. 285)

He points to a need to rethink how successful integration is measured.

In a health and social services context, researchers examined aspects of empowerment in exchanges between the service providers and immigrants, both adult and children. Empowerment has the potential to assist with cultural

adaptation because it brings to light the individual's own resources to help them understand how they can cope with a current difficult situation. In these research projects, a call for adaptation to be reciprocal, effecting the immigrant and locals as well, can be seen. Lillrank (2013) looked at empowerment dialogue between prenatal nurses and a Somali immigrant to Finland. The dialogue resulted in her taking comfort in help from her health care providers, her fellow immigrant friends, and her spiritual belief. It was found that the care providers' training in building trust and showing empathy proved supportive for encouraging the dialogue that resulted in the mutual acculturation process. Katisko (2013) examined immigrant evaluation of the aspects of empowerment (or non-empowerment) of the support provide by Finnish child protection services. For this research, she considered empowerment to be the "individual sense of being heard and the opportunity to be a participant in decisions concerning oneself ... also ... part of the larger society, and that he or she gets a sense of equal treatment as a client" (p. 138). She found some evidence of increased empowerment particularly among the underage clients. She suggested that as the "number of immigrants' increases in Finland, successful integration is essential to the cohesion of the host society." And went on to remind us that "integration is a dynamic two-way process involving both immigrants and the host society with responsibilities on both sides" (Katisko, 2013, p. 142).

Some advice is at hand for locals working with immigrants. Practices that prevent youth workers in Finland from recognizing, preventing, or intervening in everyday racism were uncovered by Kivijärvi and Heino (2013). These included: seeing racism as something that only a few (marginalized) people engage in or as "an inherent (biological) feature of human beings that has to be tolerated,"

downgrading its significance by equating it with minor bullying or teasing, and emphasizing “the problematic attitudes of ethnic minority youth” and so not needing to be addressed as a societal problem (p. 237). They suggest both indirect and direct as well as preventative and interventive practices that enhance empowerment among ethnic youth, including providing an interethnic an intergenerational forum to discuss experiences of racism and to explore minority perspectives and dealing with acts of racism swiftly via positive intervention that provides emotional support and legitimizes the experience of those involved.

In summary of findings from research on adaptation of immigrants to Finland from several different disciplines: they

- suggest a promotion of an appreciation for cultural diversity in Finland, though finding differing orientations of adaptation among their cohort (cf. Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000, finding mostly integration and Veistilä, 2013, finding more assimilation/separation),
- consider that the assimilation orientation has psychological disadvantages (Liebkind & Kosonen, 1998),
- conclude that integration is a two-way process (Lillrank, 2013; Katisko, 2013), changing not only the immigrant but locals as well, and
- call for the development of opportunities to create deeper connections (Croucher et al., 2013; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013), some having found evidence of only superficial contact between immigrants and locals.

This summary demonstrates that some researchers in Finland are shifting away from the assimilation/melting-pot preference towards integration/multiculturalism.

3 METHOD

3.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to understand the factors related to the successful adaptation of long-term immigrants to life in Finland, and with that information at hand, to exploit some of the lessons learned to inform new immigrants as well as locals who are trying to adapt to these fresh newcomers. To this end, I attempt to expose the voice of immigrants rather than measure their adaptation against long-established models. Taking what some of the research presented in the literature review in section 2 proposes, that adaptation is a two-way process, as given, I decided to focus more on the immigrants' perceptions of their own adaptation process and to examine the interplay between their perceptions of their own strategies and their perception of the strategies employed by the local society.

The following research questions will be answered:

RQ1) What kind of societal and personal factors do well-adapted, long-term immigrants attribute to their successful adaptation to Finland?

RQ2) How do well-adapted, long-term immigrants view the demands of the host society in relation to their own adaptation strategies?

In section 2.1, you saw that Tardif–Williams and Fisher (2009) called for a “reconceptualization of acculturation as a dialogic, relationally constituted and continually negotiated (unfinalizable) process.” They went on to say that it “is best captured using narrative and qualitative methodologies” (p. 151), which is the methodology I chose as a means to find answers to my research question.

3.1.1 Qualitative research and heuristic phenomenology

This study follows the guidelines of qualitative inquiry. Put simply, the purpose is to expose how people make sense of their world and Silverman (2010, p. 10) suggests that qualitative methods lend themselves well to “exploring people’s life histories.” While for some qualitative studies it is possible to collect data both on what people are doing and what they are saying, in this case I tried to uncover what they did in the past, without, for the most part, asking directly “Did you do X?”, but rather via questions that for the most part would stimulate reminiscing around the topic area to capture their story.

I chose heuristic phenomenology because phenomenology lends itself well to examine the essence of an immigrant’s lived experience of adapting to Finnish culture, as it focuses on

exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others (Patton, 2015, p. 115).

The fact that I was a fellow immigrant assisted in making this almost a gathering of shared meaning, although, in the interest of hearing more from them, I kept my input into the conversation to a minimum (eliminating it completely would have negatively affected the rapport between us). However, as Krippendorff (2009) points out about direct interview or observation type qualitative research, there is no way to determine what kind of effect researcher presence has on the behaviour or responses of the participants. My intent was that the interviewee would be aware that I was a Canadian, and for the most part, they were. There was, however,

one interviewee who discovered for the first time during the early stages of the interview that I was not a Finn (which was evident in the way I phrased a follow-up question). Reaction to my phrasing of a follow-up question to a second interviewee revealed that throughout most of that interview, he thought I originated from the same country as he. While it is likely that, in both cases, the misunderstanding had some effect on the data, I decided that the effect was likely minimal. In the latter case, the misunderstanding may have improved rapport from the start, and, in both cases, the obvious innocence of the revelation within the follow-up question may have served to deepen the rapport. At least, I did not detect any reluctance to share their experience through the remainder of the interview, and surely they would not have confirmed that I could use the transcript (which I supplied them with after I transcribed the interview), had they felt as though I intentionally hid my background.

Heuristic phenomenology encourages discoveries, personal insights, and reflections of the researcher, as belonging to the group being investigated, to take full advantage of their connectedness to the topic at hand while illuminating the voice of the participants but yet concluding “with a ‘creative synthesis’ that includes the researcher’s intuition and tacit understandings” (Patton 2015, p. 119). In addition to some researchers promoting the benefits of a researcher being closely connected to the topic, some go as far as to suggest that researchers cannot be completely neutral in acculturation studies (Tardif–Williams & Fisher, 2009). To fully interpret what is presented in this research, one needs to know a bit about the background of the researcher in so far as it reveals that the first four systematic steps to Heuristic phenomenology (i.e, initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination) have been followed. My initial engagement occurred

when I met and married a Finn who recently had arrived in Canada (1989–1990). My immersion started during a short dating period and continued in many varied ways with living with my husband (1990–present) both in Canada (1990–1994; 2000–2007) and in Finland (in his home town, 1995–1998; in a second community, 1998–2000; and after a seven-year term back in Canada, in a third Finnish community, 2007–present). An important part of my incubation is the movement within Finland, but also my return to Canada, albeit, to a new community for me (2000–2007). The realization that cultural adjustments were required of me even within my home country was an eye-opener. Although, in hindsight, every move I made within my home country throughout my childhood and early adult years (and there were many) required at least minor cultural adjustments.

Illumination is a bit harder to pinpoint the beginnings, as it may have started long before my initial engagement with a Finn and continued throughout the first three steps. I adjusted well to many communities as a child, having adapted to various unilingual and bilingual communities in my native country (my family's mobility started before I was born, so in a way we were always on the fringe of being part of the majority culture that surrounded us or constantly becoming). I studied in the United States for my bachelor degree and worked in Canada with colleagues from numerous cultures. I adjusted well to my first community in Finland (having developed deep connections to both locals and fellow immigrants, which included ample discussions about our varied adaptation). In contrast, I adjusted rather poorly to my second community in Finland and, as a result, returned abruptly to Canada (having had deep connections to mostly fellow immigrants; which again included discussions about adaptation but some of these discussions had me on the mal-adjusted side). I adjusted back to life in

Canada with no traumatic incidents, but it did provide some interesting realizations about my own adaptation. I returned to Finland with a new career, for which I was encouraged to not assimilate fully (teaching my native language and culture), and with a deep desire to integrate, thereby exploring ways to expose myself sufficiently to develop deep connections to both locals (through work and hobbies) and to a diverse range of foreigners (through integration courses, internships, and a university master's degree program). Learning Finnish (to a somewhat usable level) in recent years has provided an exposure to a wider range of Finns (not only those skilled in English). Studying about intercultural communications and linguistics (starting in 2009, after having adjusted to several communities in Finland and while continuing to adjust) has given me the opportunity to reflect on my ongoing adaptation with a much different skill set. I continue to discuss adaptation-related topics with Finns, fellow foreigners, and even friends and family back home (often via social media).

Adherence to the remaining three steps to Heuristic phenomenology (i.e., explication, creative synthesis, and validation) can be assessed from the remaining contents of this thesis.

3.2 Designing the interview instrument

In designing the set of interview questions, I carefully examined examples given by Patton (2015) and followed his advice about designing open-ended interview questions. After designing the main questions, I considered Patton's (2015) suggestion that for an outsider to make sense of why people do what they do (or in this case say what they say) one must look at many aspects of the person's history (e.g., childhood) as well as in their current surroundings. I therefore

added, to the beginning of the instrument, questions that would help me discover more about the individual's background, which may seem unrelated, but were helpful in my better understanding their answers as well as may have helped themselves make better sense of their own experiences. Patton (2015) suggests to look for and follow up on the unexpected. This encouraged me to follow up by probing for more context on interesting portions of their responses to the prepared questions.

In addition to the open-ended questions to discover what lead to an individual's positive adaptation experience, I used Berry's (2009, p. 366) diagram "Adaptation strategies in ethnocultural groups, and in larger society" to help the interviewee identify their own acculturation strategies and those of the Finns. From my own experience having discussed adaptation with a variety of immigrants over the years, I was sure that many immigrants do not have a clear understanding of the difference between the various adaptation strategies, and when asked directly what strategy they use, the answer would more likely match what they have been conditioned to prefer, rather than revealing what they were truly using. The diagram offered a way, with researcher prompting, for the interviewee to analyze their resulting strategy.

As an immigrant, myself, who matches the selection criteria of my research, my experiences, where similar or different from those described by the interviewees, for better or worse, plays a role in both what I recognized as significant enough to follow up on during the interview, and on how I chose to combine and relate the experiences of various interviewees when analyzing the data. This is considered a normal phenomenon of qualitative research. According to Krippendorff (2009, p. 25), "communications scholars ... can never escape

participation in the culture that produced them.... To understand our scholarly role is to conceptualize ourselves as co-constituents of the phenomena we address.” My personal experience as a self-described well-adjusted, long-term immigrant who first arrived in Finland as an adult can be seen as an advantage. Patton (2015, p. 116) said that “the only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves.” Although, I attempted not to elicit what I expected or wished to hear in phrasing my follow-up questions, the mere act of choosing what to follow up on (and what not to) comes from my related experience as much as the interviewee’s responses themselves. Through my studies in intercultural communications and my encounters with many people from many different countries (in many different contexts: work-related, education-related, and personal) including long before most, during some, and after much of my IC studies, I have acquired skills in building a rapport with diverse interlocutors, so that I could, at least by my own assessment, be naturally empathetic to easily remain neutral and ever mindful throughout the interview. I have long known that we immigrants do not all have the same experiences before and after arriving in Finland, and that this diversity has an effect on how we are able and/or how we choose to adapt.

4 DATA

4.1 Data Collection

In total, 16 immigrants (7 females, 9 males) were interviewed in early 2016. The potential interviewees were contacted by private written message (via cell phone texting, email, or social media). The criteria presented in the interview request was that the immigrant

- is not a direct Finnish descendant,
- moved to Finland as an adult,
- has lived in Finland for at least 5 years,
- is generally satisfied with their life here in Finland, and
- is willing to be interviewed in English.

The criteria were chosen and adhered to in order to illuminate practices that lead to successful acculturation. The interviewees did not include any of my current work colleagues or close friends (my first interviewee was a good friend, but that served as a test of the instrument and that interview data was not included in this research). The sample consisted mainly of people I have met over my 16 years of living in Finland whether through my studies, through teaching English (former clients as well as former colleagues) or at various multicultural events. Of those who were not already acquaintances, two were brought forward as potential

interviewees by friends and another was encountered, by chance, while I was waiting for an interviewee to arrive.

All interviews were audio recorded and conducted in English. Most of the interviewees were advanced speakers of English (including 4 native speakers). Few (3) exhibited a small amount language-related difficulty during the interview, either seeming frustrated at times when trying to express themselves and/or requiring clarification of one or more interview questions.

The interviewees were from various countries: Algeria, Cyprus, France, Germany (3), India (2), Italy, Nigeria, Romania, Russia, the United Kingdom (2), and the United States of America (2). Their reasons for being in Finland varied: Of the 16, some were in a relationship with a Finn (7) having either a Finnish girl/boyfriend or spouse already when they arrived in Finland. Some had study placements (6) or work contracts (4) in Finland on arrival (3 of those with employment or education opportunities were also in a relationship with a Finn). The remaining two interviewees followed a family member: one came with a spouse who relocated for work, and the other followed a sibling who relocated for love. Six of the 16 indicated a strong desire to leave their home country, whether in search of a better way of life/culture (2) or for adventure (4; including 1 who specifically wished to experience everything Finnish).

4.2 Description of Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. With the first few transcriptions, all false starts to sentences and pause utterances were transcribed, but I soon realized that the interviewees would be overly concerned with how they really spoke and might either decide not to allow me to use the

transcriptions or find themselves with a large task of deleting the extraneous wording. Rather than risk having this happen, I transcribed with a bit more thought to the meaning. However, I did not attempt to correct grammar errors and errors in word usage. As is a common practice in qualitative research, the transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for verification that their meaning was preserved (see participant validation in Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). A few interviewees added more details to the transcription and some edited their transcriptions for accuracy of meaning, grammar, or to preserve anonymity. All interviewees confirmed by email (after receiving the transcription or when sending their edited versions) that I could use the data in my research.

I began the analysis process by going through the electronic transcripts and highlighting interesting excerpts as well as adding researcher comments. When the last interviews were processed in this way, I transferred the highlighted excerpts and my comments to a new document (making note of which interview each excerpt/comment pertained to), and began organizing these into categories, creating new categories as they arose. In doing so, I followed the advice of Silverman (2010, 10), who suggested we “reject arbitrary self-imposed categories” and let the data take us where it will. Categories were eliminated that did not pertain to the research questions and what remained was examined again for possible recategorizing. After the final categories were determined, the original transcripts were examined again to unearth any additional examples that fit into the categories, after which the writing of the data presentation began and the outcome is presented in the next section.

In my analysis of the 16 interviews, I attempted to stay true to qualitative research by highlighting the meanings made by the immigrants,

looking for the root of positive adaptation through the immigrant's perspective and experiences, and examining the similarities and differences between their stories. Next, I present the results of this analysis.

5 RESULTS

The data analysis described in the previous chapter resulted in organizing the data in the following categories: (a) finding the right fit (including ways to get embedded in society, comfort in standing out, random acts of kindness by Finns, and comparisons to earlier home country), (b) barriers to attaining and maintaining social contacts (including limited interaction, lack of Finnish language skills, perceived level of acceptance by locals, dealing with subsequent relocation, different situation for men than women), (c) comparing perceived self and host society IC strategies, and (d) expressions of intercultural growth and its potential beyond the person.

5.1 Finding the right fit (Embeddedness in social structure)

For me, I don't see any community. I see you creating your own world or your own little community of friends. (male, 38y)

The sentiment noted in the above excerpt was echoed by another interviewee and elaborated: *"I was going to say there isn't any community here, but there is.*

However, you learn the hard way about how different it is” (male 60y). He goes on to describe that his neighbors do not work together as a community the way they would in his home country. A more distributed community can be seen in most of the interviews. In the table presented in the following subsection, the precious few that might relate to connections in the immediate neighborhood involve having established contacts via one’s children (male, 60y; male, 54y) or one’s pet (female, 46y). The vast majority pointed to connections from the workplace, studies, or common interests (e.g., religion, hobbies) that would tend to be more dispersed. One interviewee (female, 45y) stands out in that she started a yearly block party in her neighborhood, which could contribute to the feel of a more localized community.

As mentioned above, the immigrants interviewed for this research have varied experience in their adaptation to life in Finland. The remainder of this section highlights the various ways they managed to fit in.

5.1.1 Ways to get embedded

Interviewees revealed the many ways that they got embedded in Finnish society (Table 1). Access to Finns in one form or another is unsurprisingly identified as the key to individual adaptation. This access was manifold among the interviewees and included having a partner or roommate(s), friend(s) or a mentor, or simply having access to Finns through regular participation in various activities—work, studies, sports, and volunteering to name but a few.

Whereas one interviewee (female, 28y) described the benefit of having Finnish roommates in the early part of her stay, another describes an unbearable situation where he could not continue to live with his Finnish roommates who

Table 1. Contributing to adaptation.

Living with Finns	female, 29y (partner) male, 37y (spouse & spouse's family and friends) female, 45y (helpful & understanding spouse) female, 46y (helpful spouse) female, 28y (roommates, spouse) (bad experience with first Finnish roommates; male, 38y)
A Finnish mentor or close Finnish friends	female, 29y (friends) male, 37y (mentor, friends) female, 28y (friends at university) male, 38y (friends) male 60y (mentor at work)
Workplace or studies	female, 43y (job, major impact; " <i>we have fun everyday</i> ") male, 36y-a (odd jobs) female, 28y (ample access in Finnish culture major) male, 60y (some access in intercultural communications major) male, 28y (ample access in unspecified major with intercultural studies) (no real access in international business major; female, 32y)
Volunteer / community groups	male, 38y (church) female, 36y (Finnish Red Cross) male, 54y (unspecified)
Child(ren)	female, 43y (baby brought interaction with family services) male, 60y (child brings Finnish peers home) male, 54y (kids' peers bring contact with Finnish parents)
A dog	female, 29y (competitions) female, 46y (people recognize your dog and stop to chat)
A (new) sport	female, 32y (martial arts) female, 45y (own & kids' sports, e.g., ice hockey) female, 36y (church boat rowing) male, 54y (unspecified)
Cultural and other activities	female, 29y (suggests Erasmus students experience local culture) male, 37y (all that you can) female, 28y (experience it with Finns, not about Finns!) female, 36y (Christmas celebrations) male, 54y (as much as feels possible) female, 45y (started a Summer block party)

would not talk to him. After only a few months, he (male, 38y) sought out fellow foreigners willing to share a residence rather than live in virtual seclusion amidst Finns. Eventually, he did find a place for himself in Finnish society despite this rough start.

Within many of the interviews, the importance of experiencing Finland culturally was highlighted. Some found a way to do just that within the student environment they were immersed in on arrival:

Everything that they did, you were involved in that with them [the Finns].... Otherwise you'd get the Finnish culture in a different forced way, but mostly the student life kind of did it for you. (female, 28y)

We were just eager to meet new people and try new things. ... Finns [were] never less than half ... because they were almost 2/3 or so [in our program]. And when we were doing Finnish cultural things, we were all [together]. (male, 28y)

However, one interviewee who was in a similar program as the interviewee quoted directly above found the student environment was very segregated: “*You have your own little group and they had their group—no interaction, how it usually is with international groups—group Finn and group other*” (female, 32y). In all three of the above cases, the foreign students would have plenty of Finns at hand to interact with; however, as noted, not in all cases did sufficient, significant interaction occur.

Another interviewee described a similar phenomenon among her fellow Erasmus students (Europeans who study in another European country for 3–6 months):

I've never been in an Erasmus party. I mean, I've always been out with Finnish people. And it was actually kind of sad that people here in Erasmus, they were here for a month and they never went to sauna, they've never maybe tasted Finnish

typical food, because they don't know [Finns]. They just hang around with them [other Erasmus students], in their group. (female, 29y)

Although, by agreeing to be interviewed, the interviewees indicated that they are generally living happily here and most have found or are finding their niche in some community, expressions of having felt segregated were not uncommon in the data. One interviewee pointed to a workplace segregation phenomenon which is similar to the one in the student environment (above): “*We are always treated as foreigners, because you are not able to speak the language. And if we are in a group of Finnish people and other foreigners, clearly the foreigners are in a different group*” (male, 52y). One female interviewee may have stumbled on a possible remedy for this phenomenon by seeking out social groups and volunteering activities where she would be practically the only non-Finn, she pointed out that although she could have used English with some of the people in the group, “*I was feeling that I exclude myself from [the] group if I start to speak English and everyone speaks Finnish*” (female, 36y). See more about the effects of language in the section about Barriers to adaptation.

5.1.2 Comfort in standing out

I have never felt the need [to behave as a Finn]. ... I am happy the way I am. That's what makes me stand out. (male, 52y)

Several interviewees expressed a distinct comfort in being different and most (11) pointed out that they were already a bit different back home (Table 2). One expressed not only comfort in standing out, but disappointment of sometimes not standing out enough:

[a very old lady] used to literally stop and look at me.... I thought it was cool.... “brown person with a little bit fair skin,

not black?” I could imagine all these questions in her head. But once, I was with a black guy... and she totally ignored me and [was] only looking at him.... I did that “excuse me! I’m here.” (male, 36y-b)

Another expressed distinct enjoyment of intentionally not behaving as expected:

“You don’t mess with Finnish women with some dirty jokes. Well, I still do, but I know it’s bad. They don’t like it. ... No, it’s not good, which makes it even more fun” (male, 42y). One interviewee went so far as to contrast that whereas being

Table 2. Expressions of being different back home.

<i>I was always the black sheep.</i>	female, 29y
<i>We were a bit different.... we were very mixed blood in the family.</i>	male, 42y
<i>It’s extreme [smoking, drinking, and drug use] and the whole peer pressure, and if you have the wrong clothes that don’t have the certain logo, then you’re the outcast...from very early on, I didn’t want to be part of it.</i>	female, 32y
<i>[During childhood] every 2 to 3 years we would ... go to a new place within our state.... I stopped actually getting really in deeper friendship with anybody, because it’s not going to last.</i>	female, 43y
<i>When I announced ... I was ... moving to Finland, my ... family’s attitude was, “well, there’s [name removed for anonymity] for you” (expressing they were not surprised).</i>	female, 46y
<i>As a child, I suffered from immensely crippling homesickness. I’d never have thought I’d have gone anywhere.</i>	female, 28y
<i>I have quite high-educated parents. And even my sister more than me, we feel that we are a little bit different than other kids. And sometimes it was even problems (sic) because kids don’t like us.</i>	female, 36y
<i>I wasn’t the same as everyone else because I was the new kid—all the time, everywhere I went [or lived as a child].</i>	male, 60y
<i>For me, [lack of socializing in Finland] it’s even less of a stretch because ... I never liked too much of the socializing for reasons maybe born as a single child, also having a few good friends instead of having a party with everyone else...</i>	male, 54y
<i>I was integrated into the community, except I needed always my me time. In the evenings, I preferred to be alone.</i>	male, 36y-b
<i>In the school, I was among the top one or two percent [academically].</i>	male, 52y

different back home was a negative thing, she feels that, in Finland, it is these very same aspects that make her valued: “‘Oh, you threw the javelin, wow!’ I’m like the hero or something... I have something different and maybe people [Finns] are curious and ask questions more” (female, 29y).

Although for most interviewees, if they mentioned how they felt about being seen as different, there was generally a positive connotation. This was not the case, however, for at least one interviewee who considers herself assimilated into Finnish society. She commented “*I think of myself as a Finn. ... don’t call me [nationality removed for anonymity] ... it sounds like a swear word to me*” (female, 32y).

5.1.3 Random acts of kindness by locals

Finnish people, some of them, they are too good to be true. They just want to help you. They want to make sure you succeed moving forward. This is an amazing place for people that really cares (sic) about you. (male, 38y)

The sentiments expressed in the above quote are echoed by interviewees who pointed at possibly atypical decisions by authorities or extraordinary help obtained from Finns that may have contributed to their successful adaptation or continued comfort here in Finland. For example, this international degree student got all the financial benefits that the locals get:

When I walked into the immigration center, I got somebody who interviewed me about why I wanted to come to Finland. And on paper I suppose it should have been studying, so I’d have not gotten any benefits from KELA. But because I was in a relationship with a Finn and I said “you know I really want to come and move here. I don’t just want to do university and go home again with my qualifications.” They put down family [as the reason for immigration], so I could apply for student

benefits and get [student] housing from KOAS and stuff. So, I got put into Finnish accommodations with a Finnish person, with Finns all around me. (female, 28y)

Another interviewee points to the persistence from the migration office as paramount in his completion of the final requirement for citizenship.

And then somebody told me that if you're ... [profession removed for anonymity] ..., then there is a possibility that they will waive that language requirement. I submitted my application [for Finnish citizenship], and then they said, "your application looks very good, but the only major problem is language. You still have to pass the test." And the immigration office kept sending me emails after emails saying that "on this date, please go and sit for an exam. ... if you don't sit in that exam then probably the decision would be negative" I was pleased actually. I was thinking that they would not at all consider my application. It means they had already made up their mind. (male, 52y)

The mention of such extraordinary incidents was rare, however, one interviewee summed up the local culture in this way: *"If you ask a Finn to help you, they will help you. They will not necessarily offer you help out of nowhere—sometimes they do, but not usually"* (female, 46y). She goes on to explain a situation where she obviously needed help reaching something and was wondering *"what the hell is wrong with these people"*, concluding *"these are the rudest people in the entire universe"*. But her Finnish spouse's reaction to a recounting of the story was *"well did you ask [for help]? ... You have to ask."* So, from her experience, she says, *"the key to living in Finland: ask! Don't be shy."* Another interviewee found that Finns readily offer help,

... they are really friendly. Really, you know trying to help. And it was like in my first three years here, if I am in [a] dark place with [a] map of [the] place, trying to find my road. Somebody will come and ask do I need help. (female, 36y)

However, she mentioned being, herself, less involved in helping other people since moving to Finland, indicating that people are generally more self-sufficient and requests for assistance are rare.

5.1.4 Comparison to the earlier home country

Better fit in Finland

Many interviewees mentioned feeling at home in Finland (Table 3), whether in comparison to other immigrants, in comparison to how they felt in their birth country, or in discussing their own adaptation. Others expressed some personality traits that matched their perception of Finns whether being relatively quiet, shy, or introverted (female, 36y; male, 60y; others mentioned being shy, introverted,

Table 3. Fitting in (some better than ever) in Finland.

<i>I really fit better here [in Finland] anyway.</i>	female, 29y
<i>I feel more at home here than I've ever felt.</i>	female, 32y
<i>This is my home, and I just have this natural love—not like, I use the word love—for this country. (In a post-interview comment, he referred to himself as “Musta Savonmies [Black Savo man, Savo being the region of Finland that he is living in]”).</i>	male, 38y
<i>Adaptation is easier if life is better in Finland than in a home country (in a post interview comment).</i>	female, 36y
<i>Now I feel I'm home in Finland but, for many years, I did not feel I have a real home country. If somebody asked me “where are you from?” I didn't know what to say. So, I didn't feel homesick or I should go back ..., so there was never this strong binding But anytime I travel, whether it's Asia or US or somewhere else, I feel very much happy to come back to Finland. So, none of the other countries has been able to challenge our decision to live in Finland.</i>	male, 54y
<i>The people ... that cannot make a home here... don't stop thinking of themselves as either expats or refugees. Finland is not their home—Finland is a place that they're living.... And if I sit down with a Finn and we have little bitch session about politics or whatever, I'm not coming at it from the approach of an outsider. I'm coming at it from the approach of someone who lives here—this is my home.</i>	female, 46y

or loners without associating it as a Finnish trait, i.e., male, 42y; female, 32y; female, 28y; female, 46y; male, 36y-b). One interviewee found it impossible to communicate in her culture's diplomatic way and finds comfort in the local direct, practical communication style (female, 32y). A few other interviewees pointed out pre-existing alignment with Finnish beliefs or attitudes regarding equity coming from countries where these views were not widespread, with one (female, 43y) claiming to have long been a vocal feminist and two stating a prior alignment with Finnish social ideology (female, 46y; male, 60y).

5.2 Barriers to attaining and maintaining social contacts

You don't drink alcohol, you don't eat non-vegetarian, you're not a sports freak—you are a social outcast basically. (female, 43y)

Although for the most part, the interviewees talked of very positive aspects of living in Finland, like anywhere else, it is not all positive—some elements have been more difficult to contend with. For these immigrants, they have had the strength to persist despite adversity.

5.2.1 Limited interaction with Finns

A large majority of interviewees mentioned that they have experienced less social interactions in Finland than they did back home. Although many consider it disadvantageous, some people indicated a similar personal tendency (female, 28y; male, 54y) or even bestowed the benefits of the reduced social demands (female, 32y; female, 43y; male, 28y; male 36y-b). One even went so far as to express an unequivocal preference for the privacy and freedom it provides:

Here in Finland living in a kerrostalo [apartment building] for all my 14 years before just moving here [a house] 2 months ago. There are maybe 40 apartments in the building and you would know the neighbors by surname because they are written on their doors. But other than that, you don't have this interaction with them. And, actually, I loved it! You go in, you say hello to the people you meet in the hallway. Other than that, you close the door behind you. And it's like, okay, I don't want to talk to you; you don't want to talk to me—I have my own little life. (female, 32y)

Whereas, some others give a balanced assessment by also pointing to disadvantages.

“... I like that privacy that we have. ... it ... has given me a lot of things, to develop my own skills and stuff like that. But then again, I've been short on friends” (female, 43y). And pointing out the positive and negative side of this individualistic society: *“You don't need to worry about public pressure, but also you [don't] receive a free hand,”* but still expressing that he *“would prefer more close human contact”* (male, 28y).

Several interviewees mentioned that Finns do not often (or never) invite you to their homes (male, 42y; female, 36y) and that there are few events that bring neighbors together (female, 46y). However, some found ways to involve themselves in the community. One extraordinary example is where an immigrant instigated an annual block party in her neighborhood (female, 45y) which has continued for well over a decade now and shows no signs of ending. Many have embedded themselves in Finnish society by participating in various activities and or through their work (for details, see the subsection Ways to get embedded). However even at work, some noted a similar phenomenon as this one interviewee who revealed that although he leads a small team in Finland (whereas he worked more independently back home), *“[here in Finland] you can get by without too much interaction with other people, and that's not necessarily a good thing as such”* (male, 37y). For some interviewees, the reduction of

interaction was much harder to get accustomed to. One in particular is a man whose first residence in Finland was a student apartment with Finns: “*It [lack of interaction] was really tough that sometimes I had to call people, my family ..., and talk to them, just to get involved with people*” (male, 38y). After a few months, he sought out and found some fellow foreigners to reside with because he was not able to quickly get accustomed to the lack of social exchanges with his roommates. Fortunately, in time, he has embedded himself in society despite this rough beginning.

Breaking into community life was considered difficult by others (female, 46y; male, 38y), but one interview added a positive twist to it: “*here in Finland sometimes it may take months or [a] year to become your friend, but when they become your friend, they are deep*” (male, 38y; with post-transcription edits and streamlining by interviewee). This deepness of friendships was echoed by another “*here, I think they [friendships] are more like true*” (female, 29y). Another interviewee must have developed deep friendships early on, because in her experience “*Finns will do things like invite you to their summer cabin. When you’ve got to know them, they’ll kind of invite you to their cultural things; and it’s really fun—you make Finnish friends*” (female, 28y).

Interviewees have had very different experiences of interactions at work. Some describe a very supportive, collaborative work environment with open communication between levels (female, 43y; male, 38y; male, 54y); whereas, one describes the frustration of an overwhelmingly bureaucratic, hierarchic relationship in which information is not forthcoming and employees must infer everything and “*have very little input into strategic planning*” (male, 60y). And yet another points out difficulty getting her Finnish colleagues to agree on a meeting time

when they would need to collaborate on something (female, 32y). The former explains that “*Finns tend to be quite implicit communicators and that they take a lot of pride in knowing how things work, and they expect you to know how things work—so that information is not shared*” (male, 60y).

One interviewee points to an effect of this lack of interaction when discussing his own adaptation to life in Finland “*if I change, I don’t think it’s being here that makes me really change, but more about what I read and see on the net [from elsewhere around the world]*” (male, 42y). He goes on to say that without the internet, life here would be difficult. Although he professed to always having been a bit of a loner, he sees the benefit of balance: “*it’s good to have both... You can’t live like a [hermit]... in a cave. It’s not health. But people say loneliness is bad—loneliness it’s a luxury*” (male, 42y).

5.2.2 Is lack of Finnish language skills a barrier?

Roughly half the interviewees reported having quite advanced skills in Finnish language, using the language for their work or quite extensively in the community (female, 29y; female, 32y; female, 43y; female, 45y; male, 28y; female, 28y; male, 54y; male, 36y-b). One interviewee, although he speaks English at home with his wife and children (all non-native Finnish speakers), reported that he is using mostly Finnish at work (male, 54y; English is only used at work when other foreigners are involved). He described the incident that made him realize that learning the Finnish language would be vital to his professional survival here:

The first year... something didn’t work. So, we had to do some changes in design. So, I explained, to the people who were doing the design and who were fixing it, what I had in mind. I explained that in English, and the outcome was a disaster. It was my fault that I have not communicated properly in local language, and English again was not familiar [enough] to the persons executing

the design. (male, 54y; minor edits by interviewee for anonymity & clarity)

And although he has learned Finnish to an advanced level, he notes some limitation: he is still not able to “*use the humor, the unwritten part of the language—read between the lines— ... as part of the conversation*” (male, 54y). Another interviewee indicated that she and her Finnish husband use English at home (despite the fact that she uses Finnish almost exclusively at work) because “*in Finnish, still after all you have to think before you say something—that’s the problem. I don’t know if it will ever go away*” (female, 32y). And although English is not her mother tongue, she explains that “*English language is just part of my being. I can express, it’s not just words but ... without saying the right words, I can express the feelings or the emotions behind it. It’s just this identity*” (female, 32y). This may point to a limit in the level to which one can build relationships in the workplace if one holds back on communicating if too much thought needs to go into it, and if one cannot fully express oneself in the local language.

Nearly one-third of interviewees pointed at Finnish language learning as a major contributor to their personal adaptation whether simply by making them feel more a part of the community or pointing to much deeper or more successful communication with locals. For one, although he pointed out feeling more a part of the community when he learned Finnish (after 6 years in Finland), he added “*I don’t know if it was like a cultural adaptation after learning language, because in Finland you can do everything with English. The culture [knowledge] was already there*” (male, 28y). In contrast, another interviewee suggests that “*people open up to you more when you speak in their own language, whether you spoke (sic) the broken one or not it doesn’t matter*” (female, 43y).

While many interviewees were satisfied with their Finnish language skills for the most part, some have indicated that lack of fluency has been a barrier for them. One stated that as a result of limited Finnish skills, interaction with Finns in the workplace is such that *“We are always treated as foreigners if we are in a group of Finnish people and other foreigners, clearly the foreigners are in a different group”* (male, 52y) and in his personal life, most of his friends are *“people from other ethnic backgrounds; we [my family] don’t have so much contacts with Finnish people”* (male, 52y). Another speculated that his own acculturation may have been partial (male, 60y), and, although he is able to function exclusively in English in Finland, he acknowledges that many immigrants have no other choice than to learn Finnish. However, he expressed some regret over his lack of Finnish language skills and the effect he thinks it may have on colleagues when telling of an incident where he attended a department meeting and his supervisor apologized that the meetings were still in Finnish. He indicated that *“it makes me feel bad, because I didn’t come here to make people speak English. I don’t want to be a problem”* (male, 60y). One interviewee revealed the sequence of events that contributed to his lack of attention to learning the language.

When I first arrived ..., there wasn’t an abundance of courses available for me to learn Finnish. ... I was only going to be here for 18 months, and there wasn’t a big desire, especially when the first class I could start was about 6 months into an 18-month period. So, then you tend to be a bit lazy about it after that. Of course, I have stayed longer. (male, 37y)

Curiously, only one interviewee mentioned engaging in multilingual conversations.

I have friends who are highly educated like teachers and doctors and so on. They know the [English] language perfectly even though they might not speak it. So, I speak in English, and

they answer in Finnish and it's fine—everybody understands everybody. (female, 32y)

And one interviewee reminisced fondly of a friendship that blossomed in her first years in Finland, which they managed with no common language.

She was very talkative. She'd talk in Finnish. We had sign languages. She would take us to places. We never understood each other ... for 2 years ... until I started going to the language course Even after the first [3-month] course ..., you can't become fluent. (female, 43y)

Three of the interviewees are (one more was formerly, female, 36y) employed in academia where English is important as an international language. For these three, the incentive to learn Finnish was somewhat diminished. One points out that “*If they had regular scientific meetings in Finnish then, I would have had to learn Finnish a bit better*” (male, 37y). However, he follows this with an expression of disappointment that “*there have been ... Finns ... giving a presentation, ... and they would have been able ... to give it in English—they had the skills—but they haven't necessarily done so*” (male, 37y). Another noted that official emails are largely in Finnish and so “*the vast majority of official emails I get, I don't read*” (male, 60y). And the third expressed disappointment that “*if there is information about a very nice funding opportunity, that is announced only in Finnish*” (male, 52y). However, he noted in amusement that the language of communication often depends on whether or not the anticipated audience is local or foreign.

The other day, in this corridor at the end of the corridor there is a toilet and that toilet was somehow leaking. And the next day ...there was a big note in English, 'Please direct your flow in a proper way.' (male, 52y)

5.2.3 Perceived Level of acceptance by Finns

I've ... had people to my face say ... that my children are not real Finns, despite the fact that they ... have never lived anywhere else. ... They're not real Finns? Wow, that was a special conversation. (female, 46y)

In the above excerpt, an immigrant points to sentiments that she has encountered in her discussions with locals. It came as a bit of a shock to her that anyone would consider her children to be not real Finns. Her children are not visual minorities, and they have been exposed to Finnish language and culture at home (raised also by a Finnish parent) and at school (not attending an international class). While their English is stronger than that of most locals, it is doubtful that their Finnish would be significantly lacking and that they would significantly stand out culturally from their Finnish peers. It may be difficult to determine how wide-spread this type of sentiment is. According to another interviewee, under most circumstances, the locals respectfully do not express their racist ideas aloud.

Someone can be racist—cannot stand you because you are brown or black, or just don't speak their [language] or you're not just from there—but they respect you, unless it's Saturday night and they are too drunk.... They keep in their eyes what they try to say but they don't say it to you, just that barrier. And it's not by law something enforced much but the culture itself, respecting the other—that's how Finns are raised. It's really something I like in them. (male, 36y-b)

One interviewee pointed out that when you break a rule in Finland, “you'll be looked at in a funny way” (female, 32y). Although an appreciation of the silent respect for the others was described as politeness by another interviewee, she also stated “but maybe sometimes it would be better to hear honest feedback, not that everyone is just quiet and I don't know what they are really thinking” (female, 36y; edited post-transcription by the interviewee). On the other hand, some

immigrants (female, 29y; female, 32y) find that Finns do express themselves quite directly “*they don’t go around like saying things in a way that the other person has to understand, but they just say it straight. Or they do in a practical way what they need to do*” (female, 29y).

5.2.4 Relocating after adaptation

My circle of friends are almost exclusively immigrants right now [in second Finnish community], but that’s just like a strange fluke. It’s not that I wouldn’t want Finnish friends. It’s because I work from home. I don’t have a Finnish working community that I hang out with. (female, 28y)

One of the four interviewees that now live in their second community seemed to notice (in the excerpt above) for the first time that the friends that she made over the few years that she has been in this new community happen to be all foreigners (female, 28y). This realization seemed to have an impact on how she assesses her own adaptation during the latter part of the interview. Another three interviewees who relocated within Finland expressed a less than ideal embeddedness in their second Finnish community (female, 43y; male, 52y) and/or reported having mostly foreigner friends in their new community (male, 52y; male, 28y), but did not attribute it directly to the move.

An interviewee who did not relocate, but reported finding himself increasingly separated from locals revealed a reason for the above phenomenon. He points to a gradual change in himself over time “*I lost my touch. When I came here ... I was more curious. It was in both ways, ... I was curious [and] I was an alien, now I’m a part*” (male, 42y). He no longer attracts the attention of the locals,

and he is no longer curious about them. Is it this loss of mutual curiosity that makes it difficult to make local friends when an immigrant relocates within Finland?

5.2.5 What about immigrant men?

I don't mix much—no friends. You got any Finnish friends? (male, 42y)

As was seen in the data already, many interviewees indicated that they experience overall less interaction here in Finland as expressed above. Unlike the majority of women, all but two of the men interviewed mentioned having all or mostly foreigner friends. Some men pointed to a reduced energy, less spirit, or lack of shared humor in their connections with Finns (male, 28y; male, 36y-a; male, 54y). In addition, several men mention the culture here of planning visits in advance as opposed to the spontaneity of fellow foreigners frequently stopping in for a quick visit unannounced (male, 28y; male 36y-a; male 38y; male 36y-b). One man assessed this spontaneity as “*good_sometimes but not [for] everything*” (male, 38Y; edited post-transcription_by interviewee).

In addition to difficulty bonding with Finnish males, a male interviewee points out a general problem attracting Finnish male friends

Finnish girls like to be your friend, but guys, no. Show me one foreign guy who has Finnish friends—except teenagers because, teenagers, it's a lot easier to hang out together. It's even cooler to have a different looking friend, but I mean adults, no. (male, 36y-b)

And another interviewee made an observation that Finnish males have a much smaller circle of friends, not “*so much in groups. And they are maybe like two. They have their own group, two people, that they meet probably every day, have sauna, and have a beer*” (male, 36y-a).

5.3 Immigrant perception of intercultural communication strategy used

In order to more fully uncover interviewees' perceptions of their own and Finnish societies' intercultural communication strategy, Berry's (2009) depiction of varieties of acculturation strategies (p. 366) was used. The strategies in his figure include integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization for the newcomers and multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion for the locals. Berry (2011/2012) does point to integration as the preferred strategy for those new to a culture in that he considers it best for personal well-being. He also argues that the best societal strategy is multiculturalism as it is the only one that truly maintains social cohesion in a society that is not unicultural. I did not indicate which strategy was preferred, nor did I attempt to define each of the strategies in Berry's figure (although at times a discussion about the meanings of one or another strategy was initiated by the interviewee). I attempted to focus the interviewee on the issues: so, to determine the extent to which they seek out relationships with other groups (e.g., Finns) and the extent to which they maintain their own heritage culture and identity. There were interviewees that were familiar with the terms and who offered an assessment of their strategy before I was able to bring their attention to the issues. In some cases, after determining their stance on the issues, they were able to agree with the resulting strategy, but in some cases, they held strongly to their first impression even if there was other evidence.

In summary, half the interviewees identified strategies that would result in integration (or at least partly; see Table 4), and some elements of integration-oriented strategies could be heard in the stories of others (female, 36y; male, 60y) even if they did not identify strongly as integrated into Finnish society. Two pointed

Table 4. Alignment of interviewees' perception of own versus Finnish society intercultural strategy used.

Interviewee (Gender, Age, Years in Finland)	Own strategy	Perceived strategy of locals	Aligned? (if not, aligning strategy)
male, 28y, 8	Integration	Melting pot; In other cities: Exclusion; Russians: Segregation	No. (Multicultural)
female, 28y, 10	Integration (and recently separation due to move)	Melting pot (mostly); For others: Segregation (e.g, non-white, non-Christians)	Mostly no. (Multicultural)
female, 29y, 8	Integration	Melting pot (public); At work: Multicultural	In society, no (Multicultural), but at work, yes.
female, 32y, 14.5	Assimilation	All 4 —good/bad foreigners; some Finns mix, some don't	Somewhat.
male, 36y-a, 6	Separation (not by choice)	Segregation (with an interest in Multiculturalism)	Yes.
male, 36y-b, 6	Integration	Melting pot (policy & most Finns; it will never change)	No. (Multicultural)
female, 36y, 8	Unspecified, or slightly integrated	Multicultural (if you almost fit)	Estimated yes.
male, 37y, 11	Middle of all 4	Melting pot (up from exclusion)	Partly.
male, 38y, 10	Integration	Multicultural (improved from segregation, by policy)	Yes.
male, 42y, 13	Separation (circumstance)	Exclusion (blames himself)	No. (Segregation)
female, 43y, 15	Integration	Multicultural; some segregation	Largely, yes.
female, 45y, 20	Integration	Multicultural (policy), Russians: Segregation	Personally, yes.
female, 46y, 15	Integration/ assimilation	All 4— Multicultural “for nice white ladies”	Personally, yes.
male, 52y, 14	Separation (prefers integration)	Fluctuated (Multicultural & melting pot & segregation)	Somewhat. (Segregation)
male, 54y, 27	Assimilation	Melting pot (mostly); starts with Segregation, will be Multicultural eventually	Yes.
male, 60y, 15	Separation (later said integrates on own terms)	Segregated; Officially Multicultural though, (and was until recently)	Yes.

unequivocally to assimilation (female, 32y; male, 54y). A few others specified that, although they have not intentionally taken on a strategy, by circumstances their strategies have resulted in relative separation (male, 42y; male 36y-a; male, 52y; the latter specified that he would prefer to be integrated). The remaining interviewee placed himself in the middle of all strategies (male, 37y).

For the most part, the perceived strategy of Finnish society (when directed toward the interviewee) matched, at least partly, to the interviewee's own strategy (see Table 4). The few mismatches were largely with individual that identified strategies resulting in integration, whereas they feel society uses strategies that would lead to a melting pot (to fully match with immigrant integration, society would embrace multiculturalism).

Among the interviewees, the most commonly indicated strategies of Finns would result in a Melting pot, although some identified that policies are aimed at Multiculturalism. The proverb "when in Rome, do as the Romans" was expressed in various forms by several interviewees whether in describing how they conduct themselves here (female, 36y), in referring to the expectations of their contacts outside of work (female, 29y), or in dispensing advice for fellow foreigners (female, 43y). Although the latter followed up with "*You don't have to be entirely a Roman, 100% Roman* [meaning 100% Finn]. *You can't be—no matter how much you try—you're never going to be that*" (female, 43y). The one who described her conduct with the proverb also admitted that her original culture does affect the extent to which she can behave like a Finn and that Finns do remind her of that fact (female, 36y). This sentiment was echoed by another interviewee who said that what she has taught her children regarding culture and communication is that

That's who I am. You can't be born and raised somewhere without being that person. So, I can choose to communicate or connect culturally with a Finn, with the knowledge that I have, knowing that I'm making that choice for whatever reason I don't attempt to assimilate culturally. I don't try to become another Finn, because I don't think you can ever get it right. For one thing, all I have to do is open my mouth and they know better. (female, 46y)

A gender difference among my interviewees is apparent here, in that only men indicated strategies that result in their separation or partially separation (with the exception of one woman who categorized herself as originally integrated, but more recently separated after relocation; female, 28y). For more about the gender disparity and relocating, see the final two subsections in the Barriers to getting and maintaining social contacts section.

There was no apparent relationship between age of the participant or duration of stay in Finland with their perceived personal strategies. However, the older participants and those with a longer history in Finland more consistently identified a personal strategy that either somewhat or completely matches what they perceived as preferred (or expected of them personally) by Finnish society and also more commonly perceived the strategy of locals as Multicultural than their younger, newer to Finland counterparts.

One interviewee (male, 28y) indicated that people do not consciously choose the strategies: *"I've been successfully integrated into Finnish culture in my opinion.... Maybe it's not a strategy. But it's ... a natural sense.... we don't choose"* (male, 28y). In other interviews, you can hear support for his observation: One offered that *"I'm allowed to maintain [my heritage culture and identity] more because I look right. Because ... I have actually heard the words ... 'those damn*

foreigners. Oh, but we don't mean you” (female, 46y). Another interviewee points to an inability to really connect with locals:

Of course, I'm trying to interact with Finns.... But...it's not happening so often. And... we have ... many Finnish friends, which we know each other for many years and whenever we meet, of course we talk and we go have a drink, but we don't have the same [dynamics]. (male, 36y-a)

5.4 Intercultural growth and its potential beyond the person

Even just going abroad for one year, it really opened the views. (female, 29y)

The personal growth attributed to moving abroad in the above excerpt could be heard from within interviews and through many of the excerpts already presented in the previous sections, but I would like to highlight a few of the experiences. An interesting revelation was by one of the older interviewees. Although he described himself as having been a nomad within his country, moving to a new community every couple of years throughout his childhood, he still attributed significant growth to moving to a foreign country (Finland) for the first time as an experienced adult.

It has altered my world view. It's sort of formed a picture in my mind of the planet earth from the moon, like the old Apollo shot of the Earth. So, my world is just that now, this entire globe. And so, I don't have a world view that is necessarily positioned in any kind of flag or religion. (male, 60y)

He mentions profoundly being affected by the social values here in Finland that brought him to a realization: “*ideas like universal health care, when looking [at the situation] back home, I can clearly see that our own society back home is really in*

urgent need for reform in certain area” (male, 60y). Although he also expresses some disappointment in the extent of the deployment of these social values:

The idea that Finnish society is really flat is completely mythical. There are really creative ways that people create and wield power here. And probably the biggest way that I've seen Finns wield power here is through knowledge.... they take a lot of pride in knowing how things work, and they expect you to know how things work.... So, there is this sheltering of knowledge, people keeping knowledge and either not giving it out or slowly giving it out or selectively giving it out or not. (male, 60y)

Another expression of the eye-opening effect of living abroad was that “*all those things ... you start thinking again about them—how right they are, how wrong they are,*” (female, 43y). Bringing your attention back to the quote featured at the start of this section which promoted the positive effect of spending a year abroad, she further commented (in writing while confirming the accuracy of the transcript) that along with gaining an appreciation of diverse cultures she has come to appreciate the things taken for granted that she no longer has every day and has a deeper appreciation for everyday things that the locals take for granted (female, 29y, post-interview comment). A profoundly positive outcome alone, however, the benefit of being immersed in a new culture can spread beyond the immigrants themselves.

This same immigrant (again in her post-interview notes) tells of her attempts to open her own father’s mind about a specific controversial issue as well as other issues in general. It seems that she sees the extended opportunity that her experience brings because in her notes she even more strongly suggests that “*to open the minds of an entire country, I truly believe they should force every student in [country removed for anonymity] to spend at least a year abroad*” (female, 29y). Perhaps it goes without saying that the majority of people in many

western countries are beyond the years of being a student, and this message was directly following her claim to be attempting to open her father's mind. Because of this connection, it seems that she may have been referring to a potential that these year-long exchanges would enable mind-opening dialogue with family (and friends) that might not otherwise occur. Hearing an alternate perspective from someone you know and respect and understand almost completely, someone who used to think exactly like you do (and still does for the most part), can be a most powerful tool. It should be noted that, in another part of the interview, she pointed out that many students in their time abroad spend little time with locals, but rather in a group of other exchange students and this may limit the eye-opening potential of the experience abroad. But even within a seemingly homogenous group there may be an opportunity for some profound growth, as one interviewee pointed out: *"You meet people and you friend them or they friend you by circumstances. The friends you have here in Finland ... would not be your friends if you were in Canada living"* (male, 36y-b).

Several interviewees exhibited a newfound capacity to empathize with other immigrants either to their country of origin or to their new home country.

I find it incredibly hard to be angry at refugees. I mean that's a whole different thing as well, ... they didn't fancy coming to [homeland removed for anonymity] to have a go. Like I came over here like "Oh, I like Finnish maybe I'll give that a go. (female, 28y)

One pointed out that learning about intercultural communications in his early years in Finland offered profound assistance in his adaptation.

I was really profoundly shocked by how things worked here in terms of this gender overlap that I perceived and I couldn't understand it. And when we got into the theory part, and I

encountered Hofstede, I thought, oh, this could be it—this could offer some insight. (male, 60y)

He went further to highlight that this opportunity to learn the theory prior to or amidst the intercultural experience is not widespread.

And I think that the advantage, compared to say an immigrant or a refugee, is that they don't necessarily have that opportunity to look at things in multiple ways. They don't necessarily have that kind of comparative theoretical bases that will help them to make sense and to appreciate, and not necessarily react negatively to anything or anyone they encounter. (male, 60y)

Although, among the interviews were examples of (perhaps newfound) empathy for other immigrants, a few seemed to lack the understanding that each immigrant took a different path here and that each has varying goals (both short and long term) and different perspectives on the extent to which they want to or are able to adapt to the local society.

The eye-opening phenomena that living in a new country provides was mentioned by many (female, 29y; female, 43y; male, 37y; female, 46y; female, 28y; male, 38y; male, 60y; male, 36y-b), but only five directly mentioned their tendency to share it with locals (female, 28y), other immigrants (male, 60y), and/or family and friends back home (female, 29y; female, 46y; female, 28y; male, 38y). And some pointed to a disinterest among contacts back home in hearing about Finnish culture (female, 28y; male, 60y), but this indicates an attempt was made, and at least in one case (female, 28y), a gentle persistence in spreading her perspective with family members back home was evident in her interview responses. The interviewees were not directly asked if living in a new country has been an eye-opening experience, nor were they directly asked if they share what they have learned from the experience with locals, other immigrants, and/or family and friends back home; however, it can be seen that the immigrant

experience provides the potential and some attempts are made (or at least there is intention).

While many point to personal changes and sharing these ideas back home, a few have a very different experience. Two interviewees comment that their families are amazed or have commented that they have not changed (male, 28y; male, 52y) as have many others who return. It, however, cannot be assumed that they never engage in controversial discussions to which they could add their new perspective. It may be that they always had, thereby no change can be detected.

6 DISCUSSION

In reading through the remainder of this thesis, keep in mind that this study is framed in heuristic phenomenology, which encourages the researcher (as belonging to the group being investigated) to take full advantage of their connectedness to the topic at hand, while illuminating the voice of the participants (as was done in the data section and will continue below), but yet “conclude with a synthesis that also includes the researcher’s intuition and tacit understandings” (Patton 2015, p. 119). To fully interpret what I present, please refer to section 3.2 for some insight into how my personal history plays a role in my interpretation.

The voice of the interviewees that I highlighted in the prior section lends support to findings of other researchers in that the immigrant experiences

vary dramatically from one another. Our background and everything about us and about all the people we have encountered throughout our life effects so much in our present. For the immigrants in this study, it affected (among other things):

- the path they were able to take in embedding themselves in their new environment,
- how comfortable they are being different (standing out),
- which actions of others they view as salient (e.g., noting acts of kindness),
- how they compare their new and prior situation (e.g., comparative fitting in),
- what barriers they encounter and how/if they are overcome,
- what adaptation strategies they employ and what they perceive that others employ, and
- what they do with the intercultural knowledge they have amassed.

6.1 Can we choose our acculturation strategy?

The significance of the realization that we might not consciously choose our strategies did not come to my mind until I took the time to address, in my own mind, a problem that came up during the second last interview (male, 36y-b). Researchers have pointed out shortcomings of Berry's 1997 acculturation diagram, for example, Weinreich (2009) and Waldram (2009) consider it unlikely that we choose to integrate, assimilate, separate, or marginalize and suggest that the diagram does not depict the continual process of acculturation. In reading Berry's (2011/2012) article on the topic, it seems that in text, he addressed those concerns. However, he neglected to address the problem in his labelling of the diagram (which he republished without change; p. 11), perhaps more suitable labels did not come

to mind. The interviewee questioned how marginalization could be considered a strategy of the immigrant, because of course we do not marginalize ourselves. This made me realize that (although labelled as strategies on Berry's 2009 diagram), all these (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization) were instead outcomes. Of course, we perhaps could mindfully do things to integrate, assimilate, or separate ourselves from a group, but sometimes, as some interviewees alluded to, it just happens. Sometimes we are not encouraged to participate and even worse, we may be discouraged. Can we do things to marginalize ourselves? Well, by intentionally separating oneself from everyone (locals, fellow immigrants, even fellow countrymen, and by abandoning one's heritage culture and identity), we could be playing a role in causing ourselves to be marginalized. However, would this have been a conscious choice? I imagine it may be a conscious choice for some people (those who are here reluctantly), but for most immigrants either integration or assimilation would likely be the chosen outcome, if it were truly possible to choose. Several pointed to separation as their outcome, even if they remain by relatively free choice and are relatively happy in Finland. The strategies (labelled issues by Berry) in this case seem more appropriately the seeking of relationships (or not) among groups and maintaining (or not) heritage culture and identity. If these strategies determine the outcome (labelled strategies by Berry), could immigrants (both new and seasoned) be motivated to target their strategies to a desired outcome if they are informed of the relationship between these various strategies and the eventual outcomes and if they determine the more advantageous outcome on their own psychological well-being? Can the effect of perceived host receptivity (Kim, 2001) of our original culture be mitigated somehow? Perhaps to do that, we need to find a way to empower all immigrants to do what Kim (2001)

suggested, strive to raise their “levels of openness, strength, and positivity” (p. 231). To this end, it may be a useful process for immigrants to be presented with research on the psychological well-being of immigrants to Finland, for example, Katisko (2013) and the numerous articles and papers by Jasinskaja-Lahti and colleagues in which integration is found to be advantageous to well-being.

As much as perceived host receptivity may affect the strategies an immigrant will eventually use in their adaptation, how immigrants feel about their own acculturation could be related to how they perceive that they are accepted by the Finns. In the related subsection of the results section where I highlighted barriers to attaining and maintaining social contacts, I noted the voice of immigrants on the topic of directness and indirectness of Finns. In some circumstances or for some immigrants, Finns were perceived as very direct, and then some noted that there is a lot left unsaid. To actually notice that the Finns are holding back on giving feedback would mean that the immigrant is interpreting something. Differences in this aspect of communication between cultures has been explored and discussed at length by many researchers. For example, Hofstede’s (1991) value dimensions covers it in their collectivism versus individualism dimension. On Hofstede’s scale, Finland is largely considered to be comparatively individualistic of a society and would be expected to be rather direct in communication style. But still we see variation within these interviews. Some of the difference of perception may relate to how much it the level of directness differs from the immigrant’s original culture, or it seems from the data that there may be some difference to how various feedback is communicated. Not all communication is direct in Finland (e.g., see in the data what one interviewee said about the funny look Finns give you if you break a rule). One interviewee even described a sheltering of information

within the workplace (presented in the intercultural growth subsection) and the expectation that some things are known. For some immigrants, it could take more time to build skills in interpret such feedback or lack thereof, and in each case our final interpretation could be correct or incorrect or somewhere in between. Also, the view by some immigrants that Finns are largely direct, may be a result of mostly communicating with locals who are accustomed to communicating with foreigners. Those locals may have learned that to be successful in communicating interculturally, they need to be more explicit. Regardless of the accuracy of interpretation of Finnish directness or indirectness, it would have an effect on your perception of the level of acceptance you receive from the Finns.

Could providing opportunities for immigrants and locals to develop deeper connections have a positive effect on both? Researchers (e.g., Croucher, et al., 2013; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013) call for just that. Some pointing out that attempts to provide a forum for deep connections to develop have been largely unsuccessful (Saukkonen & Pyykkönen, 2008), possibly because there still remains a concentration of policy toward the non-reciprocal development of the immigrant toward the labor market (Saukkonen, 2013).

Could multicultural Finns and seasoned immigrants be encouraged and enabled to play a role in assisting new immigrants and other Finns in their pursuit of these deeper connections? My data shows that some of the immigrants make a special effort to help others understand and appreciate cultural diversity, and within their stories, you can imagine that they have encountered Finns who are capable of doing the same. They have indicated that there may be something inherent in the Finnish culture that makes it possible for at least some immigrants to be comfortable remaining different, to a certain extent. Are Finns not overt in

their attempts to conform the immigrant to Finnish culture? If Finns are mostly oriented toward a melting pot (encouraging assimilation), as many interviewees perceived, can something be done to change this orientation? Or, if Finns are already largely multiculturally oriented (as other interviewees indicated), can something be done to correct the immigrant's perception?

My data supports Waldram's (2009, p. 174) notion that we neither consciously acculturate nor do we become encultured, but rather we go through a "process of learning to be cultural in a given real world context." Not only is the process something we go through unconsciously, it is also unstable. This brings to mind the two interviewee who noticed a shift in their outcome; one pointing to her subsequent move to a new community in Finland and the other attributing it to a loss of mutual curiosity due to his adaptation. It adds to Tardif-Williams and Fisher's (2009, p. 150) observation that "acculturation experiences should be reconceptualized as a dialogic, relationally constituted, and continually negotiated (unfinalizable) process." Recently, some effort has gone to developing a theory that addresses this: cultural fusion (see Croucher & Kramer, 2017; and its introduction by Kramer, 2000).

6.2 Can we find community in Finland?

In the results section, we saw that some of the interviewees have struggled to embed themselves in the Finnish community. Some point to a lack of localized community. Many of them managed to get some of that community feel from a more dispersed community than they are accustomed to, and often this is via either a new or existing interest that they hold in common with some locals. If there is truly a lack of localized community, how can one get embedded in the community

if one does not have children or a dog, does not have common interests with locals (e.g., religion, hobbies), does not have a vibrant workplace, and is not enrolled in a lively educational program?

This is perhaps where Finnish authorities have been trying to effect change. The intent is solid, according to Saukkonen (2013):

In principle, integration has deliberately been defined [*by Finnish authorities*] as a holistic process where immigrants are supposed to both participate in Finnish society and to maintain their own language and culture, and where Finnish society is also expected to adapt to changing circumstances. (p. 285)

However, in Sinkkonen and Kyttälä's (2014) research to uncover good practices in Finnish immigrant education, they noted that much of

the good practices mentioned by the teachers were associated with transmitting the Finnish language and culture to the 'others'. The teachers in our study concentrated on what the 'others' might and should learn from 'us', and not to things that we could learn from those who represent other cultures. (p. 180)

This seems to confirm Berry's (2011/2012) note that, despite the European Union's 2005 adoption of a set of "Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration", which he confirmed contains the cornerstones of multiculturalism, much of the research in Europe shows "that it is acceptable to express one's heritage culture in the family and in the community, but that it should not be expressed in the public domains, such as in educational or work institutions" (pp. 8–9). He pointed out that this is in contrast to the intent that the process be "one of mutual accommodation" (p. 9). Saukkonen (2013) also points to the initiative of authorities as not successfully addressing these principles in that they concentrate "almost exclusively on the personal development that the immigrant makes in finding their

place in the Finnish social, economic, political and cultural systems, and in the labour market in particular.”

My interviewees spoke of Finnish language acquisition, some pointed to it as key to adaptation and others as a barrier to adaptation (if they feel they lack the skills). In the case of all my interviewees, they were able to communicate quite effectively in English. One even pointed out that he had adapted to the local culture long before he concentrated on learning the local language. The integration courses, at least when I attended almost a decade ago, were focused on preparing the immigrant to handle all aspects of life in Finland in Finnish. During the various full-time courses (which for me lasted only about a year, as I tended to jump into the middle of ongoing courses to fill spaces that suddenly were vacated), there was little access to actual Finns (other than the teaching staff).

It may seem obvious that the sooner one learns the local language the better they will integrate, but in fact Finland is not a unilingual country. English may not be an official language, but it is taught quite aggressively throughout most levels of education here. According to a survey conducted by the European Commission (2012), 70% of Finns consider themselves able to hold a conversation in English, and many report that they know enough English to follow news broadcasts on TV or radio (50%), to read news and magazine articles (49%), and to communicate online (51%). Additionally, 77% of Finns reported that they use their “First” other language either often or daily, but this would include Finns who consider their “First” other language is something other than English.

Will learning the local language really make an immigrant happier? Maybe not. Anniste and Tammaru (2014), in comparing ethnically Estonian and ethnically Russian immigrants from Estonia, found that the ethnically Estonian

immigrants were more likely to have become “proficient in Finnish, to have personal relationships with Finns, ... to live with a Finnish partner ... to be well integrated in the labour and housing markets” (p. 402). Yet, their data showed that more of the ethnically Estonian immigrants expressed an intent to return to Estonia (24% as compared to 9% of the ethnically Russian Estonians). However, to be fair, the intention to return to one’s home country does not necessarily indicate unhappiness but does put to question the value of linguistic acculturation. In the analysis of their data, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (2007) found that “linguistic acculturation was directly and negatively related to psychological well-being” (p. 89). This might come as a surprise, but when you look at the data presented in the results section, you see that many interviewees managed to find local support networks long before they (and even if they never) learned Finnish.

In the same research, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (2007) found that “female immigrants who interacted more actively with both ethnic and host support networks reported a higher level of psychological well-being,” but “the relationship between social support networks and psychological well-being was not statistically significant for males” (p. 88). This might explain why the men I interviewed reported less interaction with locals than the women. For some of them, it may be that they are not seeking out those contacts because they do not need much interaction to be happy. However, several of them mentioned that they would prefer more contact than they are getting. If they want it, you would think that they would be able to find it. However, it might not be so simple. One of the interviewees observed that local men seem to spend time with very few friends (maybe only one). If indeed local men do not need more social contacts, that might leave immigrant men with a choice of making friends with local women (as

another male interviewee indicated might be the only gender available to adult male immigrants in Finland) or seeking out fellow foreigners (as was also mentioned in several interviews).

Berry's (2011/2012, p. 9) claim that multiculturalism "has not failed [*in Europe (or in this case Finland)*] because it has not even been tried" might seem an exaggeration, but as we heard from both Finnish researchers of adaptation and from the immigrants interviewed here, there is a need for, as Saukkonen (2013) called for, a more comprehensive approach. Croucher et al. (2013, p. 116) in an analysis of Muslim immigration to Finland advised "governments, communities, and individuals will need to work past superficial contact between groups to generate understanding between dominant and minority groups."

A very positive initiative was recently announced by Jyrki Katainen of the European Commission that would impact at least new immigrants who would like to join the work force in Finland (and with their presence will, I hope, offer intercultural contact to many Finns in the work force). This initiative follows a Payment by Results investment scheme using the Social Impact Bond model, developed in New Zealand and first seen in Finland in 2010. Explained by Jyrki Katainen (European Commission Press Release, 2017), the agreement seems aimed at something deeper than just assisting the immigrant in finding employment but also to deliver "the desired positive social outcomes by identifying, teaching, mentoring and guiding migrants and refugees to social inclusion in Finland."

6.3 Can foreigners be a resource supporting cultural understanding?

In the previous two subsections, I ended by pointing to a need to foster deeper connections between locals and immigrants. Croucher and Kramer (2017) consider

difference as a vital element of communication and innovation and suggest that without it there is nothing to discuss or digest. In the final subsection of the results, we heard from the interviewees that some of them have noticed a profound effect that living in Finland has had on their own cultural growth. Fortunately, there does seem to be an opportunity for some immigrants to not completely conform in Finland, perhaps because Finland is a rather individualistic rather than a collective society (see Hofstede, 1991).

Certainly, when immigrants communicate with locals there is an opportunity for an exchange of ideas which has the potential to cause identity renegotiation. Ting-Toomey (1993) wrote about communication resourcefulness from an identity negotiation perspective and the key being management of two dialectics: inclusion-differentiation and security-vulnerability. These dialectics were evident in the stories I collected. While some interviewees reported being lonely and feeling segregated from locals, and others highlighted their comfort with standing out (being different) from the locals—some even could describe how it is advantageous. Ting-Toomey (1993) warned “too much inclusion or connection can stifle one’s personal/group space or privacy, but too much differentiation or deindividualization can lead to alienation and loneliness” (p. 82). The immigrants who manage to not become alienated here seem to have a deeper consciousness of who they are. Ting-Toomey (p. 76) stated the “human being in all cultures carry with them images of themselves that are both unarticulated and articulated” (citing Turner’s 1987 chapter “Articulating self and social structure” in Yardely and Honess’ *Self and Society: Psychological Perspectives*) and, in explaining the difference, she explained that articulated images are those that “surface into our

consciousness when they are called into question by others or ourselves in a particular communication episode” (p. 76).

The increased exposure to Finns is building the immigrant’s conscious knowledge of themselves as well as building the Finn’s knowledge of themselves. This is a huge advantage alone, but this increased knowledge of self helps us learn to better understand the Other, which Kramer (2016) considers key to becoming truly intercultural. The immigrants that feel comfortable standing out seem to be living by what Kramer (2000) suggested, that it may be better to innovate rather than simply adapt, that “the most sophisticated of social skills may be expressed in the process of testing novel ideas and behaviors, finding them to be successful and thus generating new standards of ‘appropriateness’ and ‘competence’” (p. 195). We could see this being propagated beyond the individual within many of the stories, where some interviewees indicated that they often take up the challenge to promote cultural understanding when the opportunity presents itself. This points to a possibility that cultural fusion is not only taking place, but is being actively enabled by some immigrants and locals alike.

Do the efforts of these immigrants make a difference in the lives of those they engage in controversial discussion with? It would depend on how they go about it. Clearly if the immigrant always simply reinforces sentiments rather than being a springboard for reflection, they may have no positive effect. Bennett (2004, p. 75) suggests that to build intercultural competence in others, one should focus on changing the individual’s worldview rather than building knowledge (e.g., area studies), trying to directly change attitudes (e.g., prejudice reduction), or building skills through simulation. For certain, if we do not engage others in diverse discussions, no one’s competence grows (least of all our own). A well-

adapted immigrant, if they have learned to communicate in a non-judgmental, non-condescending way but rather a genuinely supportive way, has the potential to help others:

- to consider new perspectives,
- to understand shared, natural cultural bias and how it is limiting,
- to reflect on confusing situations (and resist quick judgment), and
- to observe situations with a more critical lens.

Those individuals who have already begun the process of becoming intercultural should be encouraged to enable others, whenever and wherever possible, to become active citizens as in an intercultural society. Such a society is described by Wood (2010) as not always “an easy place to be.” He goes on to explain that

being an active citizen here demands that you engage and interact; that you question and are prepared to be questioned by others; that you listen and are listened to; and that you are not afraid to disagree but will go the extra distance to work through and solve a conflict to arrive at a common solution. (p. 29)

If intercultural individuals persist to demonstrate these skills and enable others to build these skills, they can truly have an impact.

In doing so, there will be barriers to contend with. The following barriers outlined by Kivijärvi and Heino (2013, p. 237) related to something that hinders youth workers in Finland from intervening in everyday racism, but can be related to any intercultural conflict between adults as well. We must (adapted from Kivijärvi & Heino, 2013, to account for a wider purpose):

- 1) stop seeing prejudice exclusively as an extreme phenomenon executed only by marginal groups,

- 2) stop defining prejudice as an inherent (biological) feature of human beings that has to be tolerated,
- 3) stop neutralizing the distinct significance of prejudice by paralleling it with any type of bullying or 'just having a laugh,' and
- 4) stop emphasizing the problematic attitudes of immigrant, which neither corresponds to the perspectives of the individuals themselves or recognize the societal power relations.

Finnish research echoes Wood's (2010) sentiment, it is not easy but think of the potential benefit. In his research on intercultural competence among teaching professionals, Räsänen (2009, p. 40) suggested that "active participation and open discussion about social justice, poverty, discrimination and gender issues are needed in schools and in society." And went on to say that "When knowledge is combined with social awareness, it enforces action towards these goals in local as well as national, regional and global arenas."

With the idea of using foreigners as a resource in mind, I take the opportunity with my next two subsections to make use of this arena to pass on some valuable advice to Finns and to immigrants. In preparing this advice, I began by noting any direct or indirect advice to immigrants or to locals that was presented within the interviews and created two lists. I then narrowed the two lists down to what I considered most significant. I emailed the resulting lists to all the interviewees and asked for their feedback on the content. The lists are the only part of this thesis that underwent anything close to member checking, which according to Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014) "seeks affirmation of the ways data are interpreted and presented," in an attempt to make the research seem more credible. It is not member checking in the true sense, because the list was

presented as a compilation from all the interviews without specifying which items came from which participants.

In an attempt to take into account the subsequent feedback, I made several improvements to the lists. I was aware that some items in the list might not be approved by all, and my initial intent was to only give consideration to the feedback that can be easily incorporated. I was aware that at least one item in the list would receive negative feedback from one or more interviewee but included it because it was brought forward by other interviewees and I considered it an important tip. As anticipated, unequivocally disagreement of the item was among the feedback. My first reaction was to agree to disagree, but I decided to experiment with it. I decided to attempt to develop wording that we could agree on. I gained an understanding of Savin-Baden and Wimpenny's (2014) warning that member checking is "a delicate balance and the researcher has to ask how much of their own interpretations are they prepared to have changed or deleted by a participant," because my first reaction to the negative feedback was that I simply would not change it. After reconsidering that stance, via email I asked a few more questions, made a couple of rounds of adjustments, which rendered additional feedback, and in the end, we agreed on the resulting tip.

This prompted me to attempt to incorporate all member feedback (where disagreement was expressed) into each list item. The finalized lists were redistributed to the all the interviewees. Hopefully, the resulting list (presented in the next two subsections) will resonate with a wider audience due to the true collaboration of culturally different individuals, which in itself lends support to cultural fusion and its benefit. There may be risk in your taking the advice into

consideration, but (as Croucher & Kramer, 2017, warn regarding controversial discussions) there is also risk in ignoring it.

The resulting lists can be found in the following two subsections. Both lists could be improved upon if a further collaborate effort were to include the voice of Finns and, therefore, are presented here to be developed upon.

6.3.1 What can immigrants take from the data?

Just see the country that you're moving to as a dentist. He's got sharp tools for the beginning. He's going to hurt you. You're going to feel bad. After a while, you're going to feel good. Just relax. (male, 36y-b)

The parallel offered above by one of the interviewees could go a long way to help an immigrant. I compiled the following list from advice either given directly by the interviewees or that could be extracted from their personal stories. A preliminary version of the list was shared with the interviewees, some of whom collaborated to improve the items herein.

1. Focus on the things you appreciate here (e.g., nature, seasons, smooth system, security, or the practicality of Finns). If there is something you cannot fully appreciate, try to find something positive related to it. If possible, develop an appreciation for Finns before you come.
2. Adopt what you can from the Finnish culture but, if at all possible, keep the good part of your native culture. Some locals will naturally pressure you to conform, but do not feel you must fully comply—adopt only what fits. Some Finns will like that you are a bit different. Be unique and have fun with it; exploit your difference. Do not fear being different; let change happen naturally.

Do not be surprised if there are some things that Finns do not like about your culture. They may have prior knowledge, accurate or not. You can help them see the good part of your culture if they are receptive, but not everyone will be.

3. Do not expect to fully recreate what you had back home. It will not be the same; but it could (in some ways) be better.
4. Try not to fill ALL your time with culturally similar people. Find ways to get to know Finns (e.g., culturally oriented work or volunteering, a shared or new hobby), even if there is some resistance. You may need some comfort contact with culturally similar people, but also find a group where you can be one of the only foreigners.
5. Moving to a new community after you have adapted to your first Finnish community takes time to recover from. You are not the same person as you were when you first arrived in Finland: you are not likely as curious about the Finns, and you have probably gotten less exotic to Finns. Make an extra effort to find local friends.
6. Resist the urge to fix the Finns, and try to limit your open complaints about the Finnish culture (see also advice #5 for Finns, below, as the point about attempting to not appear judgmental and the fact that you are a valuable source of information goes both ways). Excessive complaints are not generally well received by anyone. Change happens naturally, slowly. And the things you think need fixing when you are new to this culture may be very different from those you will consider necessary or even desirable when you have learned to understand and appreciate the Finnish culture. That having been said, once you have gained an appreciation for the Finnish culture, you might develop ways to communicate and become successful in championing progressive

change. However, be aware that it is an extremely delicate process and requires a lot of tact and extensive knowledge of the local culture to achieve success.

7. Learning the language takes time; be patient. Enjoy the mental exercise of having a new language in your head—find a way to love learning it, otherwise it will be hard. Get comfortable using the language. Start developing your local language skills as early as possible, otherwise you might never start. Be brave; do not be afraid to make mistakes. You may find some Finns overly critical of your imperfections, but other Finns will appreciate that you are showing an interest in their language. It's a good idea to help your Finnish friends understand the level of language correction that you are comfortable with and to help them become more accustomed to (tolerant of) the imperfect use of their language.
8. Finns usually take you at your word, so if you say you will do something it will likely be expected.

6.3.2 What can Finns and the authorities take from the data?

Maladaptive *natives* may become bitter, angry, resentful, hostile, and disengaged ... with extremely 'closed' personalities [they] tend to distort their understanding of the *immigrant* culture, bitterly denounce it with paranoiac defensiveness in dealing with *immigrant* people, and engage in excessive glorification of their original cultures (adapted from Kim, 2001, by De La Garza & Ono, 2015, swapping all the occurrences of the words *native* and *immigrant*, to highlight a reciprocal truth).

Attention is often on the immigrant when it comes to adaptation, but in the passage above, De La Garza and Ono (2015, p. 275) pointed out an even bigger

social concern today (more significant than immigrant defense of their original culture) by craftily swapping the terms *native* and *immigrant* in several passages from Kim's (2001, p. 111 & p. 174) *Becoming Intercultural*. They suggest that "hostility toward immigrants may be vastly more significant to the migrant's experience than any willingness or unwillingness on the migrants' part to give up their culture or take up the culture of their new home." (p. 281). In the interest of preventing the spread of anti-immigrant sentiment, I offer the following tips for Finns that I compiled from the interviews of the immigrants in this study.

The immigrants who were interviewed in this research identified themselves as relatively happy with their lives in Finland. They indicated that they are or would prefer to be, for the most part, integrating despite feeling that, for the most part, this is not what Finns want from them (note that multiculturalism would have been the societal strategy that would match closest to an immigrant's integration strategy). Several interviewees were able to point to attempts by local individuals and authorities to promote multiculturalism but felt that the concept was in its infancy in Finland and that many existing policies still are not quite multicultural but rather more of a melting pot (encouraging assimilation). Some indicated an appreciation for the work toward multiculturalism that has begun. The advice that you might take from this research, if you are receptive to receive advice from immigrants who are relatively happy here, is

1. Continue your outward looking tendency (checking what is working well or not abroad)—some immigrants think this is transforming Finland to an increasingly multicultural society or at least that improvements are noticeable.

2. Help newcomers take part in community activities as soon as and whenever possible (so they will not have only culturally similar friends). Some basic instruction to make initial contact with locals more successful is advised (e.g., haptics, time, how to interpret silence, how Finns start conversations with strangers and how they exchange contact information) so that newcomers do not scare off the Finns. But, keep in mind that immigrants adapt in their own way, at their own pace. If you see a real need to advise, consider pacing out your advice to best serve the immigrant's current needs, so that they are not overwhelmed. Do not try to turn them into a stereotypical Finn (it is neither possible to achieve, nor does it exist). Also, appreciate the positive aspect of cultural differences, and do not be surprised that some aspects of the Finnish culture cannot be appreciated and adopted by the newcomer.
3. Provide ample venues/opportunities for individual foreigners to truly interact with individual Finns. This would help the foreigners integrate as well as would give the Finns deeper, genuine exposure to other cultures. Find ways to bring locals and immigrants together long before the immigrant becomes fluent in Finnish, a time-consuming feat. Awaiting fluency risks the newcomer either surrounding themselves with fellow foreigners or leaving Finland without ever truly having experienced the local culture.
4. Do not fret about small talk. While the comparative lack of small talk in Finland comes as a surprise initially, some immigrants come to cherish the quiet and the reduced social demand may be helping them fit in. But break the silence, if you can, in order to reduce the need for immigrants to surround themselves with fellow immigrants for human contact.

5. If you have interest in the foreigner's culture and language it is usually good to be inquisitive, especially if you come across as genuinely interested rather than overly judgmental (warning: Some foreigners will not want to share their culture and language, but many will). At the same time, look for opportunities to slide in highlights of the uniqueness of your culture when possible. Do not wait to be asked specific questions. When a newcomer shares their culture, they do not necessarily know the full extent of how their culture differs from Finnish culture so they may not know to ask. You are a source of valuable information. If you are not able to fit in the information within the immediate conversation (especially without sounding judgmental) make a mental note to address it at another time if possible.
6. Reach out to foreigners who have moved from other communities in Finland. They seem culturally adapted, but may have difficulty getting embedded into a second community. They may have become less likely to start conversations with strangers (out of respect) and can easily find themselves surrounded by newcomers, who more readily initiate conversation.
7. Make room for individuality: appreciate and harness the variety of talents of your citizens, rather than exclusively making use of individuals who can do everything. Continue efforts to tailor education so that people can excel where their interests and talents lay. Foreigners need meaningful career possibilities—opening up opportunities specifically for foreigners could inject diversity in your businesses. Enabling some local employees to act as mentors for these foreigners could provide some Finns with the very deep interaction that is key to true intercultural learning. Finnish companies (especially those with international ambitions) could make use of a largely untapped resource by

strategically placing foreigners at all (even the highest) levels of management. This has potential for building intercultural intelligence and enables diverse ideas to be brought to light by educated and experienced immigrants.

8. Continue to expand efforts to bring the positive experiences of immigrants to the public via relevant media sources, and find a way to open up discussion among both new and seasoned (whether integrated, assimilated, separated, or marginalized) immigrants.

7 CONCLUSION

One aim of this research was to explore the stories of generally satisfied, long-term (min. 5 years) adult immigrants of non-Finnish descent and to highlight societal and personal factors that they attribute to their successful adaptation. The data revealed that the interviewees, for the most part, managed to embed themselves into a community, albeit a more dispersed one than they were accustomed to. Many of them expressed a comfort in standing out. Several pointed to specific extraordinary actions on the part of locals that helped in their positive adaptation. In addition, some indicated that they fit in better in Finland than in their country of origin.

Many interviewees pointed out barriers to their adaptation including limited interaction with locals, being limited by insufficient Finnish language

skills, and a perception of some limit to the extent to which they, as immigrants, are accepted into society. Those interviewees who have relocated to a subsequent community in Finland, after initial adaptation, noted newfound difficulty adapting when their initial adaptation went well. And it appeared that some of the men were finding it more difficult to get and remain embedded in the community.

In the discussion section, I pointed to Finnish research that showed a policy attempt to promote integration (multiculturalism) by Finnish authorities, but a lack of evidence of such an attempt in some forums where this should be happening. The focus is largely on the immigrant adjusting. I encourage more effort be made to promote the integration for all immigrants, but particularly creating forums for immigrant men to develop intercultural friendships with their Finnish counterparts. In addition, I explored some research that might dispel the myth that learning Finnish is paramount to adjusting to life in Finland. It may not be evident in the discussion, but I still advise immigrants to make some effort to learn the local language, if they can, but encourage them not wait to build fluency before begin to mix with the locals.

A second aim was to compare their own adaptation strategy to the strategy they perceive is generally demanded by the host society. In my analysis and subsequent discussion, I discovered that Berry's (2009) strategies for immigrant acculturation (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) may not be so much strategies but rather outcomes and that the issues as labelled on his acculturation diagram (p. 366) would be better considered the strategies.

Basically, almost half of the interviewees identified themselves as having integrated. The older interviewees and those in the country longer more

commonly perceived the aim of locals as Multicultural, which would match the most common (integration) orientation of these immigrants. However, overall, the most common perception was that Finnish society was using strategies that would result in a melting pot (which would match an assimilation orientation of the immigrant). Providing forums for immigrants and Finns to truly learn from one another could change the mismatched perception—either changing the reality or correcting the immigrants’ perception.

In attempting to reveal what others can learn from the experiences of these well-adapted, long-term immigrants, I used the interviewee’s stories to create two lists: one with advice for new immigrants (see subsection 6.3.1) and the second containing advice for Finns and Finnish authorities (see subsection 6.3.2). These lists may be able to be improved upon by adding the voice of Finns to the process.

What I have learned from the process is that, as a society, we need more opportunities for real, deep, meaningful communication, as many researchers are calling for. We have tremendous resources (many immigrants and many locals) that have been nowhere near overutilized. Genuinely multicultural immigrants and locals have the capacity to offer more than they currently do. It is clear to me that Finnish society needs to find a better balance between keeping the best of its fabulous culture and adapting to a changing demographic (including that brought about by immigration). Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) suggested we “consider the attitudes and perceptions of the immigrants, so that their preferences can be taken into account” but warn that because of so much variability, “the best outcomes will result from providing real opportunities for immigrants to make choices as to the way and extent to which they retain their

ethnic identity and develop a new identity” (p. 506). However, I suggest that we need more initiatives that encourage and enable both immigrants and locals (men and women) to engage in deep interaction that could potential result in expanded worldviews and dispel prejudice. We should stop assuming that anyone is satisfied with a “group Finn and group other” format in any situation, at least not when there is a common language (whether Finnish or other).

I join the many voices in Finland to applaud the government for its continual adjustments to its policies and ask for a bit more. The recent Social Impact Bond initiative announced in the European Commission Press Release (2017) will give Finns and immigrants access to intercultural working relationships, which could open the door to social relationships for both. But please assist all immigrants, regardless of their employability, to become embedded in the Finnish society with whatever language and intercultural skills they have as they continue to adapt to life in Finland. “Civil society should be given a full role in this work ... to assist learning and to connect people” (Saukkonen, 2016, p. 20). In addition, “it is important to incorporate the experiences that many new Finns have into integration policy preparations and implementation” (p.18). Also, work on arming seasoned immigrants to assist in the process in their everyday life. Many are already able and willing, but our message and methods could use tweaking, and some of us may need to have our own minds opened to not inadvertently simply propagate anti-immigrant sentiments. We need ample exposure to one another to become resourceful communicators: cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, and ethically (see Ting-Toomey, 1993).

To quote Adler (1998) in his sentiments regarding the all too rare genuine multicultural individuals: “it is these people who are uniquely equipped

to mediate the cultures of the world" (Adler 1998, p. 242). We need to promote an environment where more people are enabled to become genuinely multicultural.

8 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Because of the small sample size (only 16), it is impossible to generalize the findings across all immigrants, let alone those who match the selection criteria of immigrants who are not of direct Finnish descent, moved to Finland as adults, have lived in Finland for at least 5 years, are generally satisfied with their life here in Finland, and confident enough in English to have agreed to being interviewed. But rather the findings could prompt further research on larger sample sizes.

8.1 Is integration the most common acculturation outcome of longer-term immigrants to Finland?

In this research, I only interviewed immigrants who consider themselves generally happy with their life in Finland and found that, among this group, integration was the most common outcome. I recommend taking a significantly large sample of long-term immigrants (whether happy or not) and not asking directly whether they consider themselves as having become integrated, assimilated, separated or marginalized (because people have preconceived notions of what these terms mean and are likely to give their desired outcome rather than accurate one), but rather asking about the strategies, maintenance of heritage culture and identity

and the relationships sought among groups, allowing those responses to point to the outcome (see Berry 2009, p. 366 for a diagram of acculturation strategies). At the same time, an assessment of relative happiness could be made and cultural (e.g., nationality, professional, gender) differences could be noted. Relocation after initial acculturation might result in a different acculturation outcome in the subsequent community, so this should be accounted for.

8.2 Do immigrants perceive that Finns are encouraging integration (so aiming for Multiculturalism)?

Perhaps in combination with the previous suggested research (if one removes the limit to include also shorter-term immigrants), a comparison could be made of the strategy of newcomers compared to longer-term immigrants, and any differences related to depth of experience (including but not limited to the number of years in Finland) can be assessed. However, variances might be a result of a shift in how locals have been dealing with foreigners in more recent years or a shift in newcomer's expectations on arrival.

8.3 Do adult immigrants re-embed themselves in Finnish culture upon relocating to a subsequent community after having achieved integration/assimilation?

In my data, it appeared that immigrants that relocate within Finland after initial acculturation might (if they do not consciously make an effort to compensate for it) end up with a less desirable outcome (separation or marginalization) and their assessment of relative happiness might be affected by their new situation. Research on this could include checking if cultural differences (e.g., age, marital status, nationality, professional, gender) are significant.

9 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

For the purpose of this study, heuristic phenomenology worked well as an approach. Carefully designing the questions not to lead to a desired answer and using my own background knowledge to know when to follow up to extract more details from the interviewees was crucial. Although I could see a benefit to using this method in order to dig deeper into the lived experience of the interviewee, I see a limitation in the fact that it would take too much time to interview sufficiently large sample of the population that would allow reliable generalizations about all immigrants. However, there were some interesting overlaps in the stories, which lend support to some of the findings of other researchers who have studied immigrants to Finland using other research methodologies.

If I were to conduct a similar research again, I would not use Berry's (2009) diagram as a prop to help immigrants identify the strategies (which I consider to be outcomes) of self and society, but rather I would simply ask about the issues (which I consider to be strategies) and I would use their responses in determining whether the immigrant had become integrated, assimilated, separated, or marginalized and whether their perception of the actions of Finns indicate that Finns were aiming at a melting pot, multiculturalism, segregation, or exclusion. I believe this would ensure a more accurate response. However, it was interesting to engage with the interviewee in the ensuing discussion about the terms and to discover how strongly we hold to our opinion of how we immigrants should adapt.

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APPENDIX: Interview questions and props used**Demographic**

How old were you when you arrived in Finland?

How long have you lived here?

Have you lived in this one community or region the whole time?

Do you live alone? Do you have children? Where do they live?

What is your profession?

How much more/less paid work would you like to have?

In your community, do you consider yourself financially richer, the same, or poorer than others?

How do you describe your English communication skills?

How do you describe your Finnish language skills (overall and specifically listening, speaking, reading, writing)?

Background

Where did you grow up?

What was it like growing up in <country of origin>?

In what ways have those early years shaped the way you are today?

Were you part of the majority ethnicity there?

Did you practice the majority religion in your community?

Were you just like everyone else?

Adaptation

What brought you to Finland?

How has living in a new culture changed the way you see the world?

Tell me something about your adaptation to Finland.

What do you do differently here than back in your home country?

Is your home life different? If so, in what way? School life? Work life?
Community life?

What do you like about the differences or what do you not like?

What do your friends and family (back home) say about the changes in you?

Do you sometimes choose to not to behave like a Finn?

Can you point to specific events during your life in Finland that have contributed to your adaptation?

Have you continued to adapt at all in the last few years?

Thinking about only the last few years, can you identify any recent adaptation having taken place?

Some immigrants seem to adapt well to life in Finland and others not so well. What do you think makes the difference?

What adaptation advice would you give to an immigrant like you?

Note: After all the interview questions were answered, interviewees were asked to identify their own and Finnish society adaptation strategies. To this end, I used Berry's (2009, p. 366) diagram of Acculturation Strategies in Ethnocultural Groups and in Larger Society, which separates the strategies of ethnocultural groups into integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization and the strategies of the larger society into multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion.